

ARGOSY

JULY
3

ALL-STORY
WEEKLY

PRICE
10¢



A New Serial by the Author of "The Seal of Satan"
The Great Commander

"America will yet have a dictator."

General Primo de Rivera



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STEADILY, the advancing rails carried westward the "Star of Empire," until at last the Golden Spike put a period to another chapter of American achievement. Through each hard-won mile the old Colt "six-gun" stopped all opposition which threatened progress.

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If you want to make \$10 to \$20 a day, if you want a chance at this big money making opportunity, mail the coupon below. We will send you our complete selling outfit absolutely free. With it will come full instructions, samples, style book, order book and everything you need to get started.

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C. E. COMER, Pres.
The COMER MFG. CO.
Dept. 51-L
Dayton, Ohio

Take orders
for this
wonderful
suit at
\$12.50



C. E.
Comer,
Pres.
The Comer
Mfg. Co.,
Dept. 51-L
Dayton, Ohio

Please send at once complete selling outfit on your new \$12.50 suit proposition that offers opportunity for a man without experience or capital to earn as much as \$150 a week. I understand that this does not obligate me in any way.

Name.....

Address.....

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXXVIII

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By **GEORGE C. JENKS**

A famous American prima donna, straight from the world's greatest opera house, goes to Wyoming to run her own ranch. Her cow-punchers grumble, cattle rustlers steal, and Len Hays, her quiet, hard-working foreman, does his best, and—Well, it begins in ARGOSY next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., **PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,**
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Do This And Make \$150^A WEEK

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In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



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Forced to leave school at fifteen, Charles W. Sheldon of Sheridan, Wyoming, worked for the C. B. & Q. Railroad for twenty-five years. At the end of that time he was a telegrapher and station agent. At forty, he quit railroad work and entered a new field. Since then he has increased his income 500%, has made a remarkable record as mayor of Sheridan, and in 1924 ranked 160th in sales among 40,000 life insurance agents.

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- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking

Name

Present Position

Address





Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

Munsey's Magazine	} Combination Line Rate \$3.00 Less 2% cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	
Flynn's Weekly	
Minimum space 4 lines.	

Aug. 7th Argosy-Allstory Weekly Forms Close July 10th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

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ILL. MAN INVENTS NEW AUTO GAS SAVER—for all makes. One Ford owner reports 61 miles on 1 gallon. Saves about one-half driving cost. Big profits selling them, spare or full time. 1 free. CRITCHLOW, 427-L.X., Wheaton, Ill.

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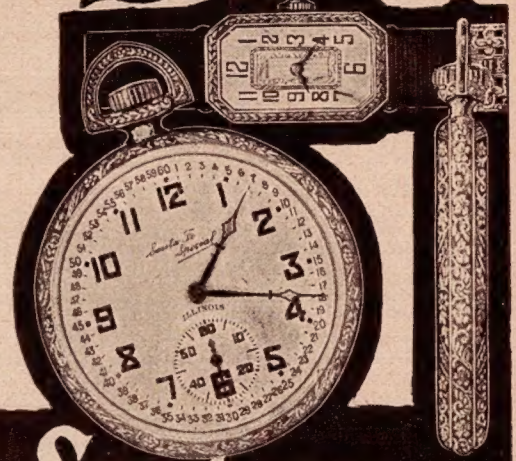
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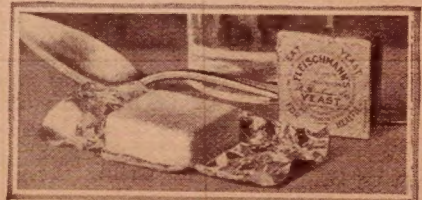
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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The Great Commander

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE SEAL OF SATAN."

CHAPTER I.

THE GREAT MOGUL.

WITH a quick nervous scratching of a gold fountain pen, King J. Nelson signed his name at the bottom of a contract, nodded dismissal to his attorney, drew a long thin cigar from his vest pocket, lighted it, pushed back his chair, walked to the window and looked down upon the city of New York from the thirty-fifth floor of the Rolfe Building.

He could see far down the harbor, past the Statue of Liberty toward the open sea, Staten Island with its factories, the broad Hudson, the sheen of the East River and grimy Brooklyn beyond.

Directly below him lay New York, a mass of roofs with streets that, viewed from his great height, looked as narrow as threads.

He regarded the scene with satisfaction as a farmer looks over his broad lands and for about the same reason. Nearly all of it belonged to him.

The last contract which he had signed completed the job. The United States of America was the world's greatest republic, the land of the free and the home of the brave, three million square miles and a hundred and fifty million people, the property of King J. Nelson.

To be sure, they did not know it yet, those people. They thought that they owned their country and ruled themselves

through their representatives, and King J. Nelson had no objections to their feeling like that so long as it kept them industrious, contented and quiet.

He smiled down upon the portion of his domain that he could see with the smile of kindly contempt which Jupiter must have worn as he viewed the ancient world from the top of Olympus.

At fifty years of age, King J. Nelson owned America; it had taken him thirty years to acquire it, and he had enjoyed the advantage of a wonderful start. There had been other captains of industry who had gained vast power in this country, but they were usually men of humble origin who had wasted the first thirty years of their life acquiring a competence, and just about the period they were beginning to get things in their hands, they had died. Nelson had succeeded his father as the head of a tremendous banking house, and his father had received from his own father a huge fortune.

At the age of twenty-five, King J. Nelson had inherited three hundred million dollars, quite a stake for a young man who wanted to make his way in the world.

For many years, wise men had been preaching the possibility in this country of ours of all wealth being concentrated in one pair of hands; if it had not happened before, it was because few great men have great sons and those who have, almost invariably have weak grandsons. King J. Nelson was a bigger man than his father and his grandfather, and his ambition was so great that nothing but supreme power would satisfy him.

As he smoked his cigar and looked out of the window of his simply furnished office, he did not suggest the uncrowned emperor of America. He was a good-looking, clean-shaven man of middle age, with a high forehead, a rather big, broad nose, a wide, firm mouth and a strong round chin.

There were few wrinkles on his face; there was no gray in his hair, although there was a bald spot as big as a dollar on the top of his head.

His figure was lean, his shoulders square; he looked as though he might be a good dancer. He was. He had kept himself fit, this man, his health was excellent, his blood

pressure normal, it was no part of his plan to die before his time. Most carefully, he had studied the career of the empire builders, the generals of commerce before him, most of whom died between fifty and sixty because they had worked too hard in early life, and he had avoided their fatal errors.

From the first, he had been able to employ great lieutenants. It is likely that he was the most competent executive who ever lived. Many of his assistants supposed they were his partners, for they shared in his profits and were rich beyond their dreams. Through them he had reached out and collected all the industries in the nation, railroads, banks, motor works, steel, copper, cotton, textiles, every important business in the land.

Like many others, he had recognized the inter-dependability of all industries; the bigger the trust, the more it depended. He had developed a system of interlocking directorates to control great groups without their knowledge. From Hugo Stinnes, the German genius of industry, who had secured control of nearly everything in his country through the fall of the mark, he had learned much, and, without the aid of a rapidly depreciating currency, he had surpassed the man's achievements in America.

Back in Roosevelt's days, the politicians had gone after Big Business with "Big Sticks," but since the war, the public had come to believe that great combinations were a good thing, made for prosperity; the gates of caution were unguarded and King J. Nelson had strolled in and helped himself.

Through a thousand channels, Nelson controlled the Congress of the United States. One of his most trusted lieutenants sat in the White House in this year of 1933.

Nelson had lifted his hand and saved France from bankruptcy. As a result, she was mortgaged to him, though her people did not know it any more than the American people were yet aware that they were the serfs of the gentleman in the Rolfe Building.

The stability of Britain's currency depended upon his whim, and the financial giants of London were his hired men.

Never before in the history of the world

had one man controlled such an empire, and never did any emperor get less out of it personally.

Hardly anybody knew King J. Nelson. He rode through the streets of New York unrecognized. When he landed in England or France, he was questioned by the customs like everybody else and upon his arrival in the capitals of those countries, he got a paragraph in the papers something like this:

Mr. King J. Nelson, an American financier, has arrived in the city and is stopping at the Ritz.

While he was working on his job, these things had not bothered the great man, but he had attained his goal, he was through; from now on, it would be a simple matter to keep things going. The last strong opponent had come into the fold, all wheels turned, all cash registers clicked, all whistles blew for King J. Nelson.

His great powers of concentration were simply marvelous, but they were no longer required. For the first time since he succeeded his father, he didn't have anything to concentrate on, and as he stood by the window, he was reflecting that he had a quarter of century of life before him if he took care of himself. He was a soldier home from the wars, but where was his glory?

If he died to-morrow, all history would have to say about him would be covered in two or three lines, while second-rate statesmen and soldiers got chapters, sometimes whole volumes. Surely the man who had accomplished more than any man who ever lived was entitled to have that fact recognized.

It has been fortunate for humanity that all its tyrants have had their weaknesses. There has been a point of vulnerability in each of them where an arrow can penetrate as it penetrated the heel of Achilles. Three generations of the Nelson family seemed to have no such weakness, but now it cropped out.

King J. Nelson, emperor of America, probably also of England and France, desired bouquets. He had begun to thirst for glory; always he had sneered at the com-

mon people, ignored them, trampled on their rights. Now he would like a little applause, please. And he began to pace his office wondering how to get it.

Libraries? Carnegie stuff. Founding universities? Rockefeller had patented that. Art museums? Munsey's idea. Benefactions wouldn't do; the public expected them from rich men; didn't cheer loud enough.

Make himself President? He could do it, but there had been lots of Presidents. Few school children could name them all; only those who had figured in wars got special recognition. He must do something that no man had done before.

As Nelson looked at it, he didn't particularly care whether he would be remembered as a good man or a bad one; he wanted to be remembered as a great one. Napoleon was as cold-blooded and selfish a butcher as ever lived; so was Alexander; and Julius Cæsar grew noble only at the very end.

Washington was a mighty figure in history; probably the finest character of all, but he had been given a picturesque opportunity. Looking over his own achievements, King Nelson believed that he was a greater man than any of them. His business for the next quarter of a century must be to get the fact recognized.

Mr. Nelson put on his hat and his light top coat. It was a bright afternoon in early June. He left his office, went down in his private elevator and entered his automobile which had been standing for three hours in defiance of traffic regulations at the entrance to the building.

Progress uptown was slow; always it had been slow, despite the hundreds of millions of dollars spent since 1926 to open new avenues, to build bridges for cross traffic and to limit the number of private automobiles in New York.

Until now, Nelson had not devoted thought to delay in traffic. He had accepted it as General Washington accepted the pace of a horse as the limit of speed in transportation. Since he had signed the contract for the last and biggest consolidation and had time to think of minor matters, it occurred to him that it was absurd

for the man who owned America to be compelled to stop at a traffic policeman's whistle.

It ought to be arranged to have all roads cleared and traffic shooed out of the way so that he could speed at forty or fifty miles an hour from his home to his office. He was entitled to that much consideration since they did it for common kings in Europe.

Kings! Huh! Wasn't he a king, the uncrowned king of America? Didn't all these people live and breathe by his permission? "Humph!" grunted the financier. Kings were a shiftless, incompetent lot, but they knew how to command respect; in olden days, the populace fell on its belly when a king passed, and crawled in the dust to kiss his foot. Very proper, too. Not a bad idea.

A king was a splendid figure with his gold crown and scepter, his robe of ermine, his brilliantly uniformed court. Those old Louis's of France had a great time; they picked and chose among the lilies of their court; the favor of the king was an honor beside which virtue had no chance.

While Mr. Nelson was a respectable widower who had never plucked primroses by the wayside, who had scorned the lovely lilies of the musical comedies and the frail society fair who would have loved to interest one of the richest men in America, he found himself attracted by this royal prerogative. Of course, he wouldn't exercise it, but it was nice to know it was so simple of attainment.

A pity America was a republic, a stupid form of government, no proper system of honors and rewards for distinguished men; presidents who wore patched shoes and smoked cheap cigars, who didn't know enough to retain the ceremonials with which General Washington had surrounded the presidential office. A bad form of government, which had little control of its people, which would permit private citizens to usurp its powers, just as he had done.

What America needed was a strong head; well, yes, a king wouldn't be so bad, or an emperor, an absolute monarch, that the people would be compelled to respect.

Confound it! Stopped again! To-mor-

row he would have to notify the mayor that his car must be given the right of way through traffic.

CHAPTER II.

THE PRINCESS ROYAL.

THE town house of King Nelson was in one of the side streets off Fifth Avenue, in the Eighties; a huge, squat, marble palace, the design of which the architect had copied from an ancient mausoleum. Its interior was as cold as any tomb, despite the latest wrinkles in heating devices, and the chillness of the institution persisted even in the family quarters, though the stone walls were hung with priceless tapestries and the cold stone floors covered with rich rugs.

The ceilings of the various salons had been pillaged from Italian and French palaces, whose owners were financially embarrassed; the fireplaces were wrenched brutally from Norman and Renaissance residences, whose surprised proprietors found that American millionaires would pay high prices for their old and rather battered chimneys. After selling quickly they were able to install new, more modern, and much better looking fireplaces for a tenth of the loot, and they were happy.

In the various long corridors and salons of the Nelson Monument—pardon, residence—lurked servitors, hulking liveried brutes who slept at their posts, and the total of whose daily labors could be performed by one Italian workman in an hour.

It took about fifty servants of all descriptions to keep the interior of King Nelson's home in its customary icy grandeur; the chief usefulness of most of them was to direct bewildered guests who got lost in the labyrinth.

King Nelson knew something was wrong with his ancestral home. It had been constructed by his father. His daughter hated the place, and lived in a cunning little chalet which had been constructed for her in the big French garden behind the house. This chalet was just a story and a half four room bungalow, furnished with comfortable Grand Rapids pieces, possessing a shining

little kitchen, a small bathroom, a long living room filled with deep-cushioned davenport, big overstuffed chairs, and all sorts of things that would have appeared incongruous in the combination tomb and art museum which was ostensibly her home.

King Nelson liked the chalet, too. He made excuses to lounge about in it during the evenings, and as his family consisted of his daughter and himself, that left the ten million dollar icehouse for the sole conglomeration of the fifty servants, most of whom sneaked out when there wasn't a function on and got warm by dancing in some cave of sin.

To-night he went directly to his room, where two valets aided him to change into evening clothes, after which he passed out of his residence into the garden and headed for the bungalow, from the living room windows of which friendly lights beckoned.

The ground occupied by the garden was worth about five hundred dollars a square foot, and there must have been acres of it, laid out by a great French architect. There were twisting flagstones and gravel paths, beds of flowers, trees, a pool and fountain with statues of a faun, and nymphs to suggest Versailles or Fontainebleau.

Nelson entered the living room and found his daughter curled upon a davenport reading the sporting pages of a New York newspaper which he particularly abominated and intended shortly to discontinue, since he now controlled all newspapers.

Dutifully she laid down her newspaper, lifted her legs in the air and swung herself off the couch, landing flat on her feet with the grace of a cat.

"Greetings, King!" she exclaimed, with a low bow. It was her custom to call her father by his first name, because it was such a regal name, and to pretend that he was a king and she was his captive.

She was a strange girl, the first member of the Nelson family to possess a sense of humor. Most of the time her father did not know what she was talking about, but he knew that she was the loveliest creature he had ever seen, even more beautiful than her mother, and he adored her.

Sydney Nelson was a tall girl, at least

five feet seven in her stockings, and her slimness made her seem taller. She had the family profile, a high forehead, rather prominent nose, and firm chin, but these features were deliciously softened in her and closely approached the pure Grecian.

Her eyes were large and singularly fine, honest, high minded, clear seeing, generous eyes, and their color was a rare bluish gray. Her lashes and eyebrows were brown, the latter arching superbly and almost meeting.

Her hair was red, a yellowish red which gleamed and glittered. When she let it down it hung two-thirds of the way to the floor; when it was piled up on top of her head it was a gorgeous sight to see. Six or eight years before it probably would have been bobbed, but women did not bob their hair any more, neither did they smoke, or drink anything stronger than cordials. The female sex had gone back to the primness of the early years of the century.

The general effect of Sydney Nelson was to overwhelm with her splendor. On closer inspection one realized that she was not a haughty, arrogant beauty. Her queenliness was purely physical. Personally, she was an exceptionally nice girl.

Sydney was the fifth generation of New York wealth, which made her a patrician among patricians in this country. Her family had been in the most exclusive coteries of society since the days of Ward McAllister, and long before. Her father had tried to spoil her without success. He had piled his millions at her feet and implored her to spend, spend, spend.

Sydney spent little, her tastes were simple, her garments costly but plain. In the safe in her chamber in the big house were two million dollars worth of jewelry of all sorts. She believed jewels were vulgar. Her fingers were ringless, and around her neck was a single strand of small pearls.

To-night she wore a plain black evening dress which fell to her ankles—short skirts had long ago gone out—and was cut with a shallow "V" at her neck. Her arms were bare—snow-white arms, needing no powder to give that effect. Sydney had the milk-white skin of the red blonde.

"Hello, Sydney; got a kiss for your

poor old father?" asked the ruler of America.

Sydney moved forward and planted a light kiss on either cheek, then pushed him down upon the davenport and flopped beside him, sitting on one of her legs.

"Well, Pops, how are tricks?" she demanded.

"Couldn't be better, dear. To-day I took over the remaining group of mines, making our control complete."

"What gets me," said the girl, "is why you bother. When you own everything under heaven you'll die from overwork, and then chaos. What do you do it for? We can't spend one per cent of our income, and you are just wearing yourself out."

"Do I look like a wornout man?" he said, with pardonable vanity.

"Physically you are a wonder, but that brain of yours must be a thousand years old. You have certainly overworked that, and the first thing you know you will blow up. Quit, dad. Let's take the yacht and go on a voyage around the world. You have always been promising to take me on a long cruise."

"I can't get away just yet," he protested. "Listen, Sydney, you are the only person in the world who knows the exact situation. None of my partners has any notion how completely national affairs are in my hands. You see, until the thing was done, there could be no sharing of the knowledge. Now, I don't care who knows it."

"What good does it do us?" repeated the practical-minded young woman.

"Isn't it a marvelous thing to know that your father controls this country absolutely, and comes pretty near to giving orders to England and France? To know that when he dies you will possess more power than ever came to any queen in history?"

"It will take that outfit of brigands, whom you call your partners, about twenty-four hours after your demise to remove the world power from my hands," she said sagely. "Father, you frighten me. Just as soon as it is known what you have done the government will arrest you."

He laughed rudely. "*L'Etat c'est Moi*. The government belongs to me, like everything else."

"Then some patriotic citizen will assassinate you."

"Yes," he said, "that's the danger. For my own protection I must take radical steps."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind, now. We'll have a nice quiet evening together."

"I'm sorry, dad, but Mr. MacGregor is coming to take me to the theater to-night."

"MacGregor, the Congressman?"

"I don't hold that against him," she laughed.

"Well, all right. But, Sydney, I don't want you getting interested in any man. I have plans for you that will astonish you."

"Better not make any plans for my future," she warned. "You may own America, but you don't own me, dad. I am not interested in any man, but if I should happen to fall in love, I would marry the man I loved."

"Seems to me I heard that sentence somewhere or other," he said with a smile. "Beware of falling in love."

They dined alone that night in the bungalow. Nelson was silent, and the girl was preoccupied. He never took his eyes from her face; had she been able to read his thoughts she might have feared for his reason. They ran something like this:

"Most beautiful woman in the world, fit to rule it, a queen if there ever was one, yet no reigning monarch would marry the daughter of a plain American citizen. I could make her a queen. Set up a monarchy in France and marry her to the king I put on the throne. Make her queen of England. No, the English would never stand for it. Their queen comes from a royal house.

"If we had a monarchy over here, if I happened to be the king, she would be a princess. They'd jump at the chance. Her son would be the King of Great Britain and America, unite the Anglo-Saxon nations, most powerful confederation the world ever knew, make the Roman Empire look like a South American republic.

"Ah, well, suppose that's impossible? Worth trying, though. Some job, turning this country into a kingdom, bigger job

than what I've done; don't believe I could do it. Certainly I could do it, but it would take time. Five years at least. Sydney is twenty-one, must see that she remains single, keep my eye on her young man, can't have a misalliance."

It was not at that moment, however, that King J. Nelson made up his mind to ascend the non-existent throne of America, since the American mind has always been contemptuous of royal trappings and Nelson was a typical American until he had grabbed everything tangible.

He began to dwell upon the possibility, almost shamefaced at first, then with more interest as he realized that its advantages were manifold and it was not beyond his reach.

He knew better than to take his daughter into his confidence. Her clear, ringing laughter would have mortified him. As a matter of fact, there wasn't any one with whom he could discuss the possibility among his most trusted adherents. Morton Q. Blunt, who was his most efficient lieutenant, who suspected that Nelson owned half the industries of America, would have regarded him suspiciously, and wondered if the great man were going crazy.

Even the owner of America could be pounced upon by relatives and friends and committed to an asylum as insane without the slightest difficulty if they charged that he was planning to be king of the United States. Delusions of grandeur, the physicians would describe his mania, and all his wealth and power wouldn't save him from being adjudged a lunatic.

No, if he did this thing he must accomplish it as he had already seized the control of industry secretly, not letting his left hand know what his right hand was doing, keeping locked in his soul his ultimate ambition, causing his workers to work in the dark.

No one dreamed at this minute that all industries were in his hands, though many bellowed against him, declared that he owned far too many important enterprises. Take the Consolidated railroads. They were supposed to be owned by a great syndicate of which Ephraim Quisick was the head and the stock owned by millions of

small stockholders. But the stock which was in the public's hand was nonvoting stock. The voting stock was held by a financial group among whom Nelson did not appear. And the majority stockholders held control by the will of several great banks who had advanced the money for its purchase and had physical possession of the stock as security. Nelson did not even appear as the owner of those banks, yet he owned them.

So it went through all the great industries. It would take the best trained auditors in the world to trace through the mazes of working corporations, holding corporations, mortgages, bank loans, interlocking directorates, *et cetera*, to the original owner, and when they found him it would not be King J. Nelson, but somebody who was possessed body and soul by a concern in which Nelson still did not show.

Without government authority to open all books all along the line they could never find Nelson, and no such authority would ever be issued by a government that he kept in his vest pocket.

Prosperity was general, every family in the nation owned an automobile except those which owned from two to six, or went in for airplanes. Wages were enormously high, the cost of living reasonable, the savings banks deposits tremendous, the nation in general well to do, but not contented and happy.

No longer compelled to scratch for existence, the masses had time to look around and see what the other fellow was doing. If he happened to be doing something which did not appeal to them they started societies to make him stop.

They worried about his religion and his habits, his morals and what he ate and drank and smoked, and they scared their lawmakers into making all sorts of laws limiting the privileges of minorities. During this time the great corporations grew greater, the trusts combined into bigger trusts.

The little manufacturers were being put out of business and immediately being taken in as salaried employees of the big concerns where they had little to do and made more money than when they had been independ-

ent. Oh, it was an era of material welfare surpassing anything which had gone before.

Big business had come to be venerated instead of execrated. All who objected were in jail or had starved to death.

How the nation would behave if it discovered itself at the mercy of a single man, King J. Nelson didn't know. Sooner or later the discovery would be made. By that time he wanted to be fixed so nothing could be done about it. He told himself that self-preservation was forcing him to ascend the throne of America, but that wasn't the real reason.

He had been bitten by the mosquito of celebrity, he wanted renown, the power behind the government was not enough. He must be the government.

After dinner Congressman MacGregor came in and was inspected by the father of Sydney. He didn't know anything about MacGregor. An individual Congressman meant no more to him than a single flea to a dog, but as a friend of his daughter's the man must be investigated. He would have Maguire, who handled Congress for him, look this person up. There were Congressmen who were not on the safe list; this one might be among them.

Minorities did not interest Nelson much. Wealthy as he was, he could not have made himself sole owner of all the industry in the country; on the contrary, he controlled many great concerns by means of a minority of the stock, being assured that, of the mass of securities in public hands, a very large percentage of it would never turn up at annual meetings.

So far as Congress was concerned all he needed was a comfortable working majority in both Houses and the right man in the White House. The remaining representatives of the people could go hang.

At times he asked himself if he were not crazy to contemplate such a monstrous thing, but he knew that it was not insanity because his reasons were so logical and clear. If he were not to be lumped with all the other millionaires of this era by posterity, he had to do something radically different. The others had tried to demonstrate how benevolent they were, he would

go the other way and figure as a wicked man; even if he lost the game he would make a terrific noise in the world.

CHAPTER III.

PRINCE CHARMING.

WHILE King Nelson sat in his daughter's bungalow living room listening to the voice of ambition, Sydney Nelson was leaning forward in her chair at a musical revue watching a dancing team with delighted eyes. Perhaps the greatest charm of this pampered girl was her child-like enthusiasm, her vivid appreciation of what was exciting or amusing.

If she liked something she liked it a lot, and in her there was nothing of the cynicism or ultra-sophistication so common among the daughters of the too-rich.

This was a good pair of dancers, graceful, youthful, charming and original, and worth raising blisters on her little hands from applauding. She turned her head to her escort, drowning him with her radiant smile.

"Aren't they wonderful?" she demanded.

"Very good," he agreed, "but nothing could be as good as you think they are."

"Don't be *blasé*. Clap your hands."

MacGregor did as he was bid. He would have jumped off Brooklyn Bridge or climbed the Washington Monument on the outside if she told him to do so, because that was the way he felt about her. And this was only the third time he had been with her. His condition if he saw her more frequently would probably be pitiful.

John MacGregor represented an East Side district in New York, and he was an East Sider himself, though he did not look like a man of the people in his perfectly tailored evening coat. He looked more like a clothier's advertisement. His parents had been immigrants, his first job had been driving a truck for an Irish contractor who stood in with Tammany Hall, and he had a nocturnal education, which means that it had been obtained at night school.

When he was thirty years old he had been elected to the House of Representatives in Washington after serving as a State

Senator at Albany. One would expect such a man to be horny-handed, rough-voiced, bull-necked and bumptious, but such is the climate of America that a man of the people can do what the leopard cannot do, change his markings.

At a ball or a banquet it would be possible to tell John MacGregor from wealthy graduates of Harvard and members of the most exclusive clubs only by a firmer jaw and a clearer eye. He spoke the English language as faultlessly as they, and his voice was rich, resonant, almost musical. In his district they said that when he talked he could charm a bird off a tree, though, as there were no trees in the district, they must have meant it in a figurative sense.

When Sydney Nelson set eyes on John MacGregor at a charity meeting at the Plaza she liked him, and when she heard him address the meeting she was fascinated by his earnestness, his eloquence and the bird-charming tones of his voice. Of course she got him brought over to her and congratulated him in a perfunctory manner, though her eyes were more enthusiastic.

"My mother had red hair," he said abruptly. "She was a beautiful woman in her day, but I think she would say that you were more beautiful."

"I supposed from your name you were Scotch, but I find that you are Irish," she smiled, not at all offended.

"Mother was Irish. Father was Scotch. I rather take after the Irish myself, and I was brought up among them. I didn't catch your name, which is too bad, because I want to put it over your telephone number in my notebook."

"Really, Mr. MacGregor, I don't live in your district, and I have never voted in my life."

"This is personal, not political, Miss—er—"

"Nelson," she admitted.

"That's something. Now if I had the other half—"

"It's Sydney."

"Do you like to have people talk to you on the telephone?"

"I don't suppose you know who I am," she said with mock dignity. "I am the daughter of King J. Nelson."

"He's nothing but a millionaire. I am a member of Congress, but I'd leave Congress flat to talk to you."

Sydney giggled. "What would you like to talk about?"

"Just to find out when I could see you."

In Sydney's world, her position was appreciated and no man had ever attempted to rush her like this. They were respectful to the point of nausea. It was as refreshing as the east wind, and Sydney loved fresh air.

"If you will stop your blarney and will promise to behave like an ordinary man who has just met a girl, I'll tell you now when you can see me. A week from Wednesday at five I am 'At Home.'"

"That means you have a party, lots of people drinking tea and cocktails."

"Something like that."

"Won't do," he said with smiling lips, but eyes that pleaded. "Got to see you privately. Very important things to tell you. And a week from Wednesday is too far off. How about to-morrow?"

"I am engaged to-morrow."

"So am I. What do I care? Can't you squeeze me in for a half an hour or so?"

Sydney eyed him with admiration. "Are you sure you can interest me enough to make it worth while?"

MacGregor grinned confidently. "Never fell down on a job yet."

"Then to-morrow at four. Do you know my address?"

"That white castle off the avenue?"

"You do know who I am."

"I know who King J. Nelson is. Who doesn't? But he never interested me before. Think of his having a red-headed girl for a daughter."

"I don't like being called red-headed."

"Prettiest color in the world. How about seeing you home now?"

"Go away," she commanded. "I've talked to you long enough. And I have an escort."

"Make it three thirty."

"Four o'clock."

"I'll be there at a quarter of four."

"You are incorrigible," she laughed.

That had been Wednesday. This was Friday night and they were at the theater. She had not told him that she had mortally

offended an important hostess by breaking a dinner engagement to go to a musical show and sit in orchestra seats with an East Side Congressman; evidently he had succeeded in interesting her.

Here was King Nelson planning to overturn the republic, seize the throne and make this girl queen of America and Great Britain; judging by the way she was looking at the individual beside her, her children's paternal grandparents were going to be Scotch-Irish immigrants.

Mr. Nelson had his work cut out for him all along the line.

CHAPTER IV.

NELSON READS HISTORY.

LITTLE things had much to do with the ultimate decision of King J. Nelson—evidence of the utter lack of appreciation by the public of his supreme importance.

At a banquet he was rarely given the seat of honor; it was reserved for some public official, usually an unwitting tool of his own. He got a summons for speeding his automobile, he was patronized at a business meeting by the pompous president of a railroad who had no knowledge that the man he snubbed was the secret owner of the property.

Of course, Nelson knew how to deal with him. Incidents so petty that they had made no impression upon him when he was driving through to his goal now irritated him.

He spent a lot of time studying the careers of men who had carved their way to thrones, but was annoyed to find that historians were usually in the dark regarding the methods followed, save in cases like that of Napoleon.

Usually such great men were helped by the mental attitude of the nations in which they operated, as there was no animosity toward a throne *per se*. Of them all, he decided that Octavius, the Roman, was the only one who had met a situation similar to that which confronted him. The nephew of Julius Cæsar had founded the Roman Empire by overturning a republic whose people were as jealous of their representa-

tive system of government as the Americans. He had done so by being careful to retain the outward semblance of the republic. He had rushed to the nation's aid when she was torn by civil war. He had made himself dictator without disrupting republican forms; the title he selected was not so obnoxious as would have been the word "king." Imperator indicates nothing but commander or general. Augustus means illustrious; and Cæsar was the family name; which did not attain royal significance for a century or more.

During the early reign of Octavius he was careful to see that elections of consuls, tribunes and senators took place in the usual way, though he had stolen all power from those officials. King J. Nelson took off his hat to the great and crafty Roman and pondered much upon his methods.

Evidently the first thing for him to do was to become a tremendously popular citizen, a great outstanding figure in the nation—one to whom the people would look to right wrongs in the face of an impotent government.

He could not be a general and lead American armies to victory; besides, there was a profound distrust of "The Man on Horseback," due to the lessons of history. Nelson knew well enough that where he was known at all he was, at present, unpopular as a grasping, selfish captain of industry who had never done a thing for his fellow citizens. That condition of mind as regards himself must be changed.

As there was not an important journal in the country now entirely independent, he knew that he could create personal propaganda more effectively than any man who had ever blown his own trumpet, but he needed advice along these lines because he had never bothered with publicity; so he pressed a button and brought running into his office Isadore Rottenburg, the head of the department of propaganda.

Rottenburg was a man of sixty years, with a shock of curly gray hair, an air of overweening benevolence, a sharp black eye and a long Hebraic nose. As directing head of the whole system of railroad, banking and mining publicity he drew one hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year.

Thirty-five years before he had stood upon a small platform outside a circus side show and addressed the yokels about as follows:

"Walk up, fall up, crawl up, ladies and gentlemen. You will find within the greatest aggregation of freaks and curiosities and marvels of nature ever collected under one canvas. You will find nothing in this entertainment to offend the most fastidious. You will come out better men and women; you will be thrilled, entertained and educated, all for the price of one silver dime, the tenth part of a dollar. Step right this way—the show is about to begin."

Afterward he had been a bill poster, then an advance man for a one-night-stand theatrical attraction, his pockets filled with bad cigars, his smile made more fascinating by the glitter of three gold teeth, in one of which had been inserted a small diamond. In later years he had been forced to submit to dentistry which removed the precious metal and jewel and substituted porcelain.

Rottenburg could scarcely write his name in those days, but he learned. He became a very skillful press agent. From the one night stands he graduated to big New York productions, and in time was hired at a large salary to represent a great film concern. His ability to advertise himself along with his attractions won him favorable attention from commercial concerns just beginning to appreciate the value of free publicity. And, by and by, his title was "director of public relations," his job to cement friendly feeling between great corporations and the press and public.

During the past two or three years Rottenburg had viewed with alarm certain developments put in motion by King J. Nelson. He saw one consolidation after another; he realized the growing influence of these big trusts upon the government and the public. He was quick to learn that the great newspapers were being absorbed or swung into line, and he had begun to wonder how much longer there would be a necessity for the kind of work which paid him so well.

Nelson had no notion how shrewdly the publicity man had guessed the situation which now existed, or that, more than any-

body else, he had figured out how completely power had come into Nelson's hands.

"Sit down, Mr. Rottenburg," said the financier, when he saw the publicity man standing respectfully before his desk. "I am going to talk frankly to you."

"Fired!" thought the press agent to himself. "Well, I've salted down a million."

"You came to us from the N. Y. P. and R. Railroad originally," said Nelson.

"Yes, sir."

"Your work has been very effective since you were placed in charge of all our publicity departments. Now I am going to set you upon a different task."

"Ha! Not fired!" thought Rottenburg.

"You may consider it vanity—perhaps it is," smiled the great man. "My policy has always been to be personally inconspicuous. There are reasons why I now wish to become a prominent, even a popular, figure."

"Say the word, and I can elect you President."

"I need no assistance in that line. I can elect myself President," said Nelson curtly. "There is something more difficult. I want the American people to like me. I want them to consider me their best friend."

"That's easy. Found a university; give away libraries."

"Mr. Rottenburg, if you believe that such things make for popularity, you are not the man I need. I want to help the people in a way they will appreciate."

"You're right, boss. They look upon those philanthropists as just great robbers making restitution."

"That is my opinion. Now what do you suggest?"

"Well," said Rottenburg, "the trouble is the people are so prosperous. You can help a fellow when he's down and out, but there is no use in giving money to a rich man."

Nelson stared at him in admiration, but he made no reply.

"I can start by sending out little paragraphs about you. Personal anecdotes. It's too bad you didn't begin life on a farm or in the slums. All our popular idols were poor boys. 'Rags to riches' fires the public imagination."

"You think it over," said Nelson. "Submit to me everything you plan to send out. Remember that this must seem spontaneous. My motives will be defeated if it appears I am indulging in personal propaganda."

Rottenburg retired. Outside the private office he permitted himself to grin a foxy grin.

"They're all alike," he was thinking. "Human nature cropping out. I thought Nelson was a superman, but the old goat, after swiping everything the American people have that isn't nailed down, now wants them to like it and think he is a hell of a good fellow."

CHAPTER V.

DESTROY TO REBUILD.

OUT of a clear sky, a month later, came the announcement from the American Coal Mine Corporation, which had combined all the bituminous and anthracite mines into one big trust, that conditions no longer warranted the high rate of wages paid the miners, and a cut in wages ranging from twenty to twenty-five per cent would go into effect upon the 1st of September, six weeks off.

In the past the soft and hard coal miners had been played against each other, many of the bituminous mines had been operated by non-union labor, and the jealousies of rival unions had prevented them from enforcing their will upon public and mine operators; but, in the face of the entire industry passing under control of a trust, the rival unions had been amalgamated, the non-union miners had joined, and they faced the big corporation united and pugnaciously.

It was evident that the shutting down of all the mines would create the worst coal famine in the history of the nation, that most industries would be forced to suspend, householders would suffer, and the poor would freeze during the cold winter. Newspaper and public demanded that the coming strike be prevented, that the coal corporation be forced to recede from its outrageous attitude.

A Congressional arbitration committee immediately waited upon Herman Black, president of the corporation, and demanded that he submit the question to them—a demand which they were powerless to enforce, since compulsory arbitration had not yet become a law, though such a law had been agitated for twenty years. Then the committee interviewed the executive board of the amalgamated unions, who declared that the business was never so prosperous; that, far from submitting to a cut, they had been contemplating striking for increased wages, and this was as good a time as any to fight the matter out.

In the face of the inevitable conflict, with its disastrous consequences to the nation, there was a panic on the stock exchange, and scores of industrials depending upon coal instead of water power saw their securities slide down the toboggan.

King J. Nelson, the great financier, broke his long silence to send out an interview to the effect that a coal strike would be most tragic, that the people would suffer, that the government should prevent it, and he would do all in his power to persuade the coal corporation to recede from its position.

Every newspaper in the country carried his picture, a recent photograph, and published a laudatory editorial upon the public-spiritedness of this great man, while regretting that Herman Black seemed to be of different clay.

With his tongue in his cheek, Isadore Rottenburg operated the lever of publicity; for he suspected, was morally certain, that Nelson secretly controlled the mines and was entirely responsible for any trouble.

On the eve of the strike King J. Nelson addressed a public letter to the President, demanding that executive action be taken to force the miners to remain at work while the coal corporation be compelled to yield to public opinion.

As the President had no authority to act in this emergency, he was compelled to ignore the letter; but a second burst of applause greeted the financier, and his daughter kissed him warmly after reading an editorial in her favorite yellow newspaper.

"You old grand-stander!" she exclaimed. "I suppose you are going to jump in and stop the strike at just the right moment!"

"I wish I could," he sighed hypocritically. "But I have been taking your advice, my dear, during the past month or two, and pulling out of things. I no longer control the mining corporation or the railroad corporation."

She regarded him in astonishment. "You never told me. Here I have been going round serenely, supposing that you owned the whole works and could do anything you liked."

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had not withdrawn. Others are less scrupulous," he sighed.

Sydney regarded him through half closed eyes.

"What's your game?" she demanded in perplexity.

"I have no game, my dear."

"Father, you won't let this strike take place. Think how terrible it would be. Why, thousands of women and babies would die!"

"I assure you that I shall try to stop any such calamity."

She had to be content with that; but there was, for the first time, a slight breach between father and daughter. She had been his only confidante; he no longer dared confide in her, for his plans were too terrible.

Her intimacy with MacGregor had become a source of worry to her father, who had tried to put a stop to it as tactfully as possible, with no success. If she should babble what she already knew to the Congressman, she might ruin him; but she was his own daughter, and she would not be likely to betray his confidence.

MacGregor he did not think was to be trusted. He had found through his governmental agent that the man was a Tammany Congressman, a good party man, likely to vote as directed by the party whip, but that he was an idealist, as honest as iron, who had never kicked over the traces because he had never been asked to support anything which he believed to be wrong.

As a son-in-law, as the husband of her

who was destined to be the first American princess, he was absolutely impossible, and he was scheduled to be eliminated in one way or another in the near future.

The day the strike began King J. Nelson announced that he would set aside ten million dollars as a free gift to buy coal for the poor of great American cities, and authorized the appointment of committees by the mayors of the cities to purchase coal at once in the open market for this purpose.

A week later the President appointed John MacGregor United States Commissioner to the Irish Free State, to distribute relief to the peasantry of Ireland, where a great famine was in progress. Under ordinary circumstances MacGregor would have declined the appointment, since he had a very important reason for remaining within five hours of New York City; but he represented an Irish district, his constituents would not permit him to refuse such an appointment, and the leader of the party told him that when he came back he would be in line to be Governor of New York.

After consulting with Sydney Nelson, he agreed to accept the commission. The girl understood why such an appointment had come to him out of a clear sky, and she smiled at her father's old-fashioned notion that a few months' absence would break up a friendship which was likely to grow into something stronger on her part. Already she knew the name of the emotion which controlled John. So she took his hand and told him to go, that she would write to him, and would be waiting for him to return.

"When you come back, perhaps I can tell you what you want to know," she assured him.

He had to be content with that.

And in America the tragi-comedy continued. For a few weeks, of course, nothing much happened, for the weather was warm; as far as householders were concerned, they would not suffer for two or three months. But a few industrial plants had to shut down for lack of coal. The stock market had not recovered, had sloughed a little lower, and directors of plants began to pass dividends in anticipation of coming losses.

When King J. Nelson went down to see the President on a special train, one car was reserved for the press, and a score of reporters and cameramen accompanied him. He posed with the President upon the White House lawn, and was astonishingly cordial to the interviewers.

The public was beginning to like this amiable financier who was making such unselfish efforts to save them from disaster. The result of the meeting was the appointment of a new commission to confer with the operators and miners, which commission was hailed as a triumph for Mr. Nelson.

Prosperity is such a fragile thing that it requires little to break it. Already millions of owners of securities were struck in their pocketbooks. The closing of the nation's factories would suspend the incomes of millions more, and throw out of employment twenty or twenty-five millions of workers. The masses had been enjoying high wages like children eating candy; they had assumed that the money would flow indefinitely into their pockets, they had indulged in an orgy of spending of years duration, their savings were insignificant. Accustomed to a scale of living such as no working class had ever enjoyed before, they had become unfitted for privation of any sort, and they were already shrieking with apprehension.

It was the gloomiest September and October since the days of the World War, for the worst fears were being realized. Factory after factory shut down—textiles, automobiles, airplanes, and finally steel.

Cold weather set in by the middle of November, and caught most of the nation with empty coal bins.

As was to be expected with a shut down of industry, the volume of freight to be moved by the railways dwindled from a great river to a trickling stream, little but grain and foodstuffs were being moved. Whereupon the Consolidated Railway Corporation, despite its great surplus, persuaded the Interstate Commerce Commission to permit it to increase freight rates more than thirty per cent, a move which cut down the profit received by the farmer for his product and raised the price of food to the consumer.

Howls of execration went up all over the nation, but the railroad directors declared that they could not be expected to operate at a loss, and they were contemplating an increase of passenger rates and a reduction of fifteen per cent in wages to all employees. At the same time the Great Oil Corporation raised the price of fuel oil and gasoline nearly forty per cent on the ground that there was not enough oil to supply the extra demand due to the scarcity of coal.

It must not be supposed that the various highly paid executives of the coal, oil, and transportation interests took these measures without protest; but they were hired men, after all, and they were by no means sure of the identity of their employer.

If they suspected that King J. Nelson was responsible for the situation, they could not understand his bitter opposition through the press. And, being supermen, they could regard human suffering with equanimity. Their opposition was based on policy.

When orders came to the Laudite Manufacturing Company, whose plant occupied six city blocks in Cleveland, and which employed twenty-five thousand men, to shut down on account of lack of fuel, President Amos Tuttle took a train to New York and called upon John Hastings, president of the Sunburst Trust Company on Fifth Avenue, through whom the order had come, to explain to him that he had been beforehand enough to lay in a year's supply of coal, which obviated the necessity of closing the plant. He was astounded and disgusted to be told that he was to lock up just the same, that if he did not obey orders a man would be placed on his job who would do as he was told.

The railroad strike started December 1. Every operating and office employee of all the railroads in the United States walked out, and, as no arrangements had been made to operate the railroads, not a wheel turned from New York to San Francisco, from Maine to Texas.

As the growth of cities had continued during the past ten years until twelve million people lived in New York, nearly five millions in Chicago, three millions in and around Boston, three and a half millions in

Philadelphia, it was evident that starvation would be added to the danger of freezing to death unless the industrial situation was quickly ameliorated.

And the great guns of the press were turned upon the government while one hundred and sixty millions of recently contented citizens raved and fumed and demanded action.

Congress was in a continual turmoil; one bill after another intended to force settlement of the strike was presented, all unconstitutional. The President issued pleas to the malcontents, pointed out the injury to the nation caused by their squabbles, implored them to get together, but carefully refrained from making threats.

The only ray of brightness in the midnight of America was the courageous and unselfish behavior of King J. Nelson.

The great financier seemed to be everywhere. He visited a dozen cities; he addressed bodies of business men, he signed huge checks to be used to help the poor, he fulminated against the impotence of the government, railed against the outworn and stupid constitution which permitted private citizens to ruin the nation and prevented the authorities from taking things into their own hands.

In Britain, a coal and railroad strike of wide proportions had broken out, which prevented America from importing large quantities of coal from abroad to help the situation. Guests in the biggest and most expensive hotels were shivering in unheated rooms by January first, and the papers were filled with lists of persons who had died of cold and privation.

Out of the teeming tenement districts of the great cities, mobs began to surge, at first orderly, then boiling with fury, ingeniously whipped to a foam by anarchist orators who saw in the wretchedness of the population a longed-for opportunity; they began to riot.

A multitude swarmed up Fifth Avenue from Fourteenth Street, swelling in numbers as it reached the aristocratic section. Some one threw a stone through the plate-glass window of a great furriers' shop, whereupon they broke all the windows, poured through the door, knocked over the terrified em-

ployees and came out wearing priceless minks, and foxes and seal and even chinchilla, garments very helpful to them under the freezing conditions.

This was the signal for general looting. Police reserves came hurrying, police in armored cars, police with machine guns, police on horseback, battalions of police with rifles and bayonets, policemen whose own wives and children were cold and hungry, who sympathized heartily with the rioting multitude, and offered a half-hearted resistance.

The chief of police, reserving his fire as long as possible, through a huge amplifier roared dire threats if the crowd did not disperse. His voice was heard above the clamor of the mob for half a mile.

Those in front had no desire to attack the police army, but the vast throng behind pushed them forward until they were almost upon the muzzles of the rifles of the police who had formed across the square at Fifty-Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue.

The order to fire was given, the men deliberately fired in the air, then the unarmed mob closed in. A sanguinary battle followed. If the police sympathized with the mob, the mob had no love of the uniforms; in self-defense, to save a battalion of infantry which was being trampled upon, the police in armored cars opened with machine guns which did horrible work in the closely packed multitude.

It was enough for the mob, which turned and swirled through side streets, wrecking and looting shops as it passed along, turning up Sixth Avenue and Madison Avenue and continuing its savage work.

For three days rioting continued in New York, millions of dollars worth of property was destroyed, several hundred lives were lost, a thousand men and women wounded. Then the sullen masses were driven back to their lairs, and quiet reigned temporarily.

The experience in New York was repeated in Boston, Chicago and Philadelphia and in smaller cities. In several places the police joined the mob and the governors called out State troops to put down the revolts. The toll of death and destruction became appalling. United States troops remained in their barracks during this period despite appeals from several States, the government

taking the stand that the States were well able to handle the disaffection.

When the uprisings were crushed, the country breathed easily for a few days, but conditions continued to grow worse. Everybody knew that the mobs would break out again in larger numbers, with more murderous intentions. Red flags appeared, were torn down by police, waved again as soon as the backs of the guardians were turned.

The alarm among the rich was pathetic, for once the patient middle classes were alienated, suffering, freezing, they, too, sympathized with the dregs and wished them success.

The heads of the great corporations barricaded themselves in their offices, their homes were guarded by scores of special police; had it rested with them, they would have yielded, but they had to take the blame for the situation and await their own orders.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MAN OF THE HOUR.

AN editorial appeared in a New York newspaper on the third of January, the most conservative and influential of all American newspapers, an editorial which was wired to every journal in the country, most of them now appearing with editions of four pages only because of a shortage of white paper. It was in part as follows:

The American Constitution has broken down in a great emergency. While the executive department and Congress are impotent, all industry is at a standstill, and the population faces death by cold or starvation, or both. It is a time for strong measures and strong men.

If the existing government cannot find a way to save the country let it yield to some one who can.

There is one man in America big enough to bring order out of chaos, one man who has demonstrated his patriotism and great public spirit in this period of horror, one man whose great ability will enable him to find the way out, a man in whom the nation has confidence.

This newspaper believes that King J. Nelson can save the country and calls upon him to do it. Let us suspend temporarily our

cumbersome and useless form of government, put all the reins in the hands of one great man, as Italy and Spain and France have done in their emergencies.

America needs a dictator, and King J. Nelson is the dictator that America needs.

From the Atlantic to the Pacific a shout went up from the starving, freezing, terrified population. There were a few cries of alarm, of warning; several senators and congressmen shrieked against the overthrow of the republic, demanded that the lessons of the world's history be heeded, but these voices were buried in the roar of approval.

After all, America was devoted to its republic because it had worked; it believed in democracy, because, under democracy, the nation had thrived, but republican restrictions had become a menace, had prevented action, had permitted willful private citizens to imperil the nation's existence.

Then came a statement from King J. Nelson.

"I was shocked at your editorial," he wrote to the editor of the *Planet*. "No man loves our constitution more than myself, yet, I must admit that it has failed in this emergency. It prevents the quick action possible for a dictator. The impotence of our public officers is not ignominious, their hands are tied. For a time, we do need a strong man who is responsible to nobody, but I do not feel I am the man. There are more capable, more patriotic, more powerful citizens. Let this burden pass from me."

The answer to that modest statement was: "Who is this man who is more capable than King J. Nelson?"

While the great man held back, as Cæsar had held back when they offered him the crown of Rome, people continued to starve and freeze and in the Far East a great power was rumored to be arming, preparing to strike a helpless America which it had always hated and no longer feared.

On February first, the President sent a public telegram to King J. Nelson.

Come to Washington.

Next day came the official announcement that King J. Nelson had been appointed Commander in Chief of the army and navy,

ruler of the air, Executive Officer of the nation in the emergency.

The papers which carried that announcement also stated that the heads of the Coal Corporation and of the Miners' Big Union had been summoned to Washington to meet King J. Nelson, who had taken up quarters in the White House, which had been put at his disposal by the President.

Nelson admitted all the correspondents to his interview with the presidents of the coal company and the miners' union. It was a brief interview.

"Open the mines," he said to the operator. "Go back to work," he said to the miner.

"We refuse," were the defiant answers.

"I do not recognize your authority," said Herman Black.

King J. Nelson touched a buzzer, and an army captain entered followed by a file of soldiers with rifles.

"Take these men out and shoot them," said the dictator, coldly. The correspondents spontaneously broke into cheers, which were silenced by a glare from Nelson.

"You can't do this! The Constitution will not permit it," shouted the miners' president.

Nelson rose from his seat.

"The Constitution of the United States is suspended in this emergency," he said, slowly. "You are guilty of treason, both of you. Take your prisoners, captain."

"Hold on!" shouted Herman Black. "I will open the mines at the old scale."

"And you?"

"What can I do?" replied the miner. "We'll go to work all right."

Thus, in two minutes, the great coal strike was settled.

As every hungry and freezing citizen had been advocating the shooting or hanging of the operators and miners for months, the outrageous, high-handed proceeding of the dictator was cheered to the echo.

That was the way to do things, that was the kind of man to run the government. Now we are going to have action. Now our troubles are over.

The following day, King J. Nelson, without troubling to consult Congress or the President, declared the United States to be

under martial law, appointed military governors for every State, and suspended all State constitutions together with the national constitution. This action won him the allegiance of the Army and Navy. Military men are, by training, violent. They had always chafed under civil domination. They welcomed the strong hand and they were ready to support it.

Late in the afternoon, he ordered the dissolution of Congress and when independent Congressmen protested, he sent a company of soldiers to clear the House of Representatives and the Senate.

A man tried to shoot Nelson as he rode through the streets of Washington. He was captured, tried by drumhead courtmartial and shot, all within an hour.

In the meantime, the Railroad Corporation rescinded the cut in wages, the railroad unions went back to work, and in one week from the time that Nelson seized power, the mines were shipping coal and the roads were in operation.

In the second week, the government seized the vast reservoirs of fuel oil all over the country and cut the retail prices in half and proceeded to sell oil to all who wanted to buy over the protests of the Oil Corporation.

A ukase to the various industrial corporations ordered them to resume operations as soon as they obtained fuel and to take back their employees with full pay from the day the order was issued.

In every city of the nation huge meetings were held and the name of King J. Nelson was madly cheered. There was no criticism of his methods; no regret for the disappearance of Republican government. The country was being run properly; a strong hand was at the helm and the troubles were over.

One despotic order followed fast upon the heels of its predecessor. The most important of these was the instruction to the War Department to recruit the army to one million men and put into effect the promotion system for regular officers which had been prepared for such an emergency.

This meant that every captain became a colonel, every colonel a general, and nearly every sergeant a lieutenant, and it created

a huge army blindly devoted to the commander who was responsible for the improvement in the condition of all.

The Oriental peril was the excuse for the huge increase in the army.

In two weeks from the first order of King J. Nelson, America was on her feet again; the railroads were giving preference to coal and food, the industries were running full blast, or paying their employees if they were not, and the American people were so grateful to the dictator that they were displaying huge photographs of him in every shop window, and many municipalities had already ordered statues to the savior of the nation.

CHAPTER VII.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD.

ALREADY the stock market was booming, the newspapers began to vaunt of renewed prosperity and from Washington came columns fulsomely praising the dictator, describing his actions, his character, his mode of living, the remarks that he made in public or private. The poor President was completely pushed out of the news.

Nelson had officially designated himself "Commander." The word "Dictator" was obnoxious to him, so he declared. He was surrounding himself with a court consisting of officers of the government, the army and the navy.

He spoke of the approaching time when he would be able to lay aside his despotic office, but he set no date, nor did any urge that he should. All realized that the present tranquillity and returning prosperity of the nation depended entirely upon the strong hand of King J. Nelson, for the situation was artificial.

The quarrels of capital and labor had not been settled. They would break out again the instant the superman turned aside. As quickly as the Constitution and the old form of government came back, at once the money power would begin to oppress the masses and the trade unions would exercise their constitutional right to strike.

It was a strange thing that this man could have concealed from the nation until

this time that he was the money power, that he had fomented the disturbances as a pretext to overthrow the government, but there was a slowly widening circle which had become aware of these things.

Herman Black, for example, the head of the coal corporation, who had been publicly humiliated by Nelson, threatened with execution, at present a discredited man, sulked and brooded in his big office in New York, for he knew that King J. Nelson had ordered the cut in miners' wages which had brought about the great strike, and through his representative had notified Black before he started for Washington that he was to demur against withdrawing the cut order, but was to yield in the end.

There were a dozen great executives of the huge trusts who understood now why they had been forced to bring the nation to the verge of ruin by conduct inexplicable to them at the time, but they were all creatures of Nelson's. He could remove them at will, and in his new post, he could have them shot amid the applause of the whole population if they attempted to make trouble.

If they kept their mouths shut, they would remain rich and powerful, perhaps form the nobility of the kingdom which they suspected Nelson intended to build on the ruins of the great republic.

Certain keen-minded editors scented the truth—those knew that their journals were controlled by great banks which took their orders from a group which Nelson was supposed to own—but these editors could not print their suspicions in Nelson's newspapers. Their typewriters were compelled to join in the universal hymn of praise.

There was one person in Washington who had all the facts and was not afraid to face the dictator—his daughter, Sydney Nelson. The girl had suffered intensely during the past three or four months. The ghastly situation brought about by her father in the face of his public utterances had stunned her, for his motives were hidden from her until the day when the *New York Planet* demanded that he be made Dictator of America.

Then she knew. Her father's shameful ambition was revealed to her. His hypoc-

risily struck her in the face. That the parent whom she had loved, admired, revered, could be cruel enough, unprincipled enough, calloused enough to ride to absolute power upon the dead bodies of the thousands who had frozen or starved, of the millions who had lost their all in the panic, revolted her.

The horrid calm with which he had hurled a prosperous nation into the jaws of death and destruction that he might pull it out for his own glory and gratification, affrighted her so that she tried to avoid him. She shrank from his kiss. She shuddered when he caressed her.

Nelson noticed nothing. His powers of concentration prevented him from seeing anything but the work in hand, and it was not until he had been a week at the helm of state that there came a showdown between the pair.

They sat at dinner at the White House, alone, for once. In the distance, they could hear band music; a great parade of jubilation and in honor of King J. Nelson was forming in the city. Presently it would pass the White House and be reviewed by the dictator.

Nelson was in high spirits. He had aged considerably in the past six months, but his eye was bright, and his smile triumphant.

"We're on top of the world, Sydney," he exulted.

"How did we get here?" she asked, dryly.

"What do you mean? The people put me here."

Sydney laid down her knife and fork.

"Father," she said, "keep your hypocrisy for the newspaper correspondents. You climbed into this place on the bodies of people you slaughtered. Your hands are stained with blood."

The Commander looked into the girl's strained face until the steadfast eyes compelled him to drop his own.

"I think you are out of your mind," he stammered. "You forget to whom you are speaking. Is that the way to talk to your father?"

"I'm sorry, father. It's the truth and you know it."

"I don't know anything of the kind," he said, furiously. "I used my influence to stop the strikes without avail until I was

given dictatorial powers by the full consent of the government and the people."

"You forget that you used to confide in me. If nobody else knew it, I knew that you had completed the one Big Trust. You pretended you had withdrawn, and I believed you until I saw your purpose. Father, how could you?"

The most powerful man in the world quailed before the fiery gaze of his daughter. Her love and admiration were dear to him, almost as dear as the rulership he had waded through dead and dying to grasp.

"If I used my commercial influence to gain supreme command," he said, in a tone of conciliation, "it was because I knew I could use it for the benefit of humanity. My end justified my means. What are a few deaths compared to the millions of lives I can save by abolishing war?"

"I suppose raising an army of a million men is for the purpose of abolishing war," she insinuated.

"Absolutely. Japan was about to strike at us. I have scared her off without the loss of a life."

"You have destroyed the republic."

"It was rotten; it deserved to be destroyed, it was corrupt and degenerate."

"And who made it so?" she demanded.

"You and men like you who did not hesitate to gain their ends by bribery. Do you suppose an honest President would have called you in and turned over the government to you. He would have settled these strikes himself. You had his hands tied."

"At least you will admit that the country is happy and contented."

"Because they haven't realized yet they have been transformed from freemen to serfs. When they do, they will blow you higher than the Rocky Mountains. You are sitting on a volcano."

"It won't erupt," he said, easily. "I'll see that it doesn't. And easy on that kind of talk, Sydney!"

"I talk as history will talk. You will go down as an impudent usurper."

"So long as I figure in history at all, I'll be satisfied."

"What is it for, father? Why have you done this thing? What do you want?"

"What did Napoleon want? Caesar?

Alexander? I want power; I love it. I'll use it beneficently."

"There never was a benevolent despot," she retorted. "You will be compelled to be a tyrant to hold on. You will be driven to murder. It breaks my heart to think of it, father."

"Come now, Sydney. You are a woman and can't be expected to understand. Think what this means to you. Why, you will be a princess. I can make you Queen of England if I want to."

"I don't want to be a princess," she wailed. "I won't be a queen. I am afraid you have lost your mind."

"Nonsense!" he said, roughly. "Now, look here, you are my daughter. Because I love and trust you, I have confided to you things that nobody in the world knows except ourselves. Can I depend upon you to keep your mouth shut? Are you going to betray your father?"

"Of course, I can say nothing," she replied. "There is nothing that I can do. I loathe and despise our situation, but if what I know was known to the world, you would be torn to pieces. Much as you deserve it, I couldn't see that."

"Of course not. Now if you don't like it here in Washington, would you like to go away? Go to London. I assure you you will be treated there like a king's daughter. Go to Paris. They'll hold a national review in your honor. You'll appreciate what I've done for you when you get far enough away to enjoy a perspective."

"I'd rather go back to New York to my little bungalow in the garden where I was so happy," she said, with tears in her lovely eyes.

"All right. I'll send you by special train with a guard of troops."

"But why a guard of troops for me? I'm nobody."

"You are the most important person in America, next to me."

She shrugged her shoulders, then guests intruded and the extraordinary conference terminated. Next morning, Sydney returned to New York in a special train.

It was met at the station by the mayor of the city and a regiment of soldiers from the fortifications. Headed by a military

band, her automobile moved slowly up Fifth Avenue, while hundreds of thousands thronged the sidewalks and cheered.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOHN SEES A PRINCESS PASS.

FROM his post in Ireland, John MacGregor had watched the progress of events in America with stupor. The elevation of King J. Nelson to a position of supreme power he viewed with dismay, since he realized that it lifted Sydney so far above him that it would be almost impossible for him to win her even if she tried to meet him halfway.

As distance gives perspective, he saw events more clearly than those who were in the thick of the turmoil which had brought about the establishment of a dictator in his beloved country, and because he was a member of Congress, far more intelligent than the average, a student of the Constitution, and a practical politician, he was convinced that there had been no necessity for the summoning of a private citizen and placing supreme power in his hands.

The means of suppressing the strikes and disturbances were within the reach of the President if he had had the courage to grasp them.

In a far greater crisis, the Civil War, President Lincoln had assumed a dictatorship, President Roosevelt would have not hesitated to nip the strikes in the bud, President Coolidge, who as Governor of Massachusetts, had taken strong measures to crush the Boston police strike and to put down anarchy would have found a way. MacGregor was sure he could have devised a bill which would have placed special powers in the hands of the Chief Executive and which would have satisfied the Supreme Court.

To him the whole thing smacked of some kind of conspiracy, the criminal supineness of Congress and the Chief Executive, the coincidence of so many strikes, the complete shutdown of all industry, the simultaneousness of the discharge of practically the whole working population of the country by their employers, and the quick resump-

tion of all activities beneath the magic hand of King J. Nelson.

It happened that Sydney had once mentioned to him that Herman Black was a close personal friend of her father's; therefore it was not likely that Nelson would have sent his friend before a firing squad, as he had threatened. What more probable than that there had been some understanding between the two financial giants and this was a gallery play?

And the high-handed methods which had followed did not seem to him to be justified by the situation to be met. Certainly there was no excuse for raising an army of one million men; no real threat of foreign aggression demanded it. Japan's menace was grossly exaggerated; European nations were still determined to mix in no more wars; but an army of a million, commanded by officers devoted to the government which had given them quick promotions, would be extremely useful in putting down a revolution—a revolution to restore the republic.

The strongest card in the hands of Nelson was the inability of the American mind to conceive that a citizen could plot to make himself a dictator, or commander, or king, or whatever he had chosen to call himself; all were too ready to believe that a public spirited citizen had answered the call of the nation in an emergency, against his will, and had assumed the dictatorship only to lay it down at the earliest possible moment.

MacGregor, himself an idealist, devoted to American institutions, as the sons of immigrants usually are, because of their favorable contrast to conditions in the Old World, did not yet suspect the motives of King Nelson. That the man was a prospective father-in-law, the father of the most adorable being in the world, a pleasant, mild-mannered individual whom the Congressman had met and liked, who had been courteous to him, militated against his charging him in his thoughts with such treason as no American had contemplated since Aaron Burr.

He was aware that, in the past, great American financiers had fought one another bitterly. What had Wall Street been about when it permitted this man to secure a power which would enable him to confiscate

their properties, throw prominent bankers and industrialists into prison, shoot them—all in the interests of the masses whom Wall Street is supposed to despise?

MacGregor had known that Wall Street had controlled the present Congress, and the executives were supposed to be under its thumb. He didn't jump to the obvious explanation that Wall Street was owned by King J. Nelson, because he didn't have the facts, but he took it for granted that the money power was behind Nelson or he wouldn't be where he was.

It seemed to him that the situation was intolerable. That Congress should meekly assemble and accept Nelson's dictum that its powers were merely advisory, angered him. What was the Supreme Court about? And the President? The army and navy, being disciplined, would serve loyally whatever authority was legally constituted, and the craven government had legalized the dictatorship.

Well, there would be one voice in Congress to protest against this state of affairs. He would be exiled no longer; he would go home and find out what it was all about.

The series of catastrophes in America had prevented the sending of food and supplies to Ireland, but plenty of money had been given the commission, and it had purchased in Europe and South America. Now the famine was about over, MacGregor could leave the work and return to New York. Accordingly he cabled his resignation to the President, not to the dictator, took it for granted that it would be accepted, and booked passage for home on the express airship which had recently been put in commission, and which made the journey from London to New York in two and a half days.

He landed in New York the day Sydney Nelson made her triumphal progress up Fifth Avenue. He was standing on the sidewalk when the embarrassed and reluctant girl passed, escorted by a royal guard and cheered by the foolish multitude as though she had accomplished some great thing instead of having the good or bad fortune to be born to Nelson and his wife some twenty years or so before.

Much as he loved Sydney, the demon-

stration infuriated him because it told him how the American people had changed during six or eight months. In a free country, where titles had always been despised, except by society folks, multitudes turned out to cheer and gape at a princess, an American princess, for that is practically what she was.

It annoyed him because it showed him that it would be more difficult than he had expected to turn the people back to the right road, and because it made it less likely that he could marry Sydney soon.

It did not prevent him from calling her up as soon as he was sure she had time to reach her home, but the girl no longer answered her own telephone, although he used the private line into the garden cottage.

A man replied, demanding his name and address, and was succeeded by a woman, who informed him that Miss Nelson would be told that he had called. If she wished to see him, he would be notified. Raging, he took a taxicab directly to the Nelson palace, where he encountered an official person who refused to take his card to the mistress of the house, and turned him away with the assurance that he would be notified if it was possible to obtain an interview.

He did not know that Sydney had never seen his cablegram announcing his return. It had fallen into the hands of a secretary who showed it to Nelson, whereupon the dictator tore it up and raised the man's salary.

For three days John MacGregor remained in New York trying to get in touch with Sydney. Once he saw her come out of the palace in her car, and to his disgust observed that a police-car swung in ahead of her and another behind her, while half a dozen policemen on motorcycles chugged along on either side.

He shouted her name from the sidewalk, but she did not hear him, and as he tried to run into the street he was grasped by a traffic policeman, who ordered him back to the curb.

He read the papers during this time, and found them reeking with praise and adulation for the Commander, editorials rejoicing over the renewed prosperity of the country, but full of the warnings that it was

a prosperity which rested in the hand of King J. Nelson; his mailed fist was the only protection against renewed outrages by capital and labor, a fresh outbreak of mob violence, probably anarchy.

In his district he found everybody back at work, drawing bigger wages than ever, praising Nelson as their savior. It was as much as a man's life was worth to say a word against the Commander at that time in New York; the same kind of people who had composed the rioting mobs would hang him to the nearest telephone pole.

In the big hotels Nelson's name was on every lip; the public discussed his courage, his force, his cowing of Congress, his defiance of Wall Street, his refusal to be brooked by technicality of law or precedent.

The contempt of law among the people who had profited most by it was almost comical; as yet they had not learned that a despot who violated laws for their benefit might violate them to their injury.

Public opinion was crystallized that Nelson was essential to the continued existence of the country; the disappearance of constitutional procedure was pooh-poohed. It had been tried in the balance and been found wanting; now we had a government that was a government.

None of these arguments affected MacGregor, probably because he had not passed through the crisis, had not seen the battle between police and mob, while affrighted guests looked down from their windows in the Plaza and other surrounding hotels and saw the flashes of guns, heard the roar of artillery, and the *put-put-put* of machine guns.

Although he heard enough to understand that no action of his would have the slightest effect upon the situation because people of all classes seemed to be perfectly satisfied—if they were slaves they hadn't discovered the fact—he was determined that he would not join in the pæan of praise.

He would watch his opportunity, he would find keen, far-sighted men, he would organize a little group, locate other little groups, and presently, when the movement had gathered enough strength, demand that Nelson restore the republic, name him for

what he was, and take the consequences whatever they might be.

In the meantime he had to see Sydney Nelson; he knew perfectly well that she would understand, that she would not be deceived by the situation, that she must resent the sudden elevation into the state of a princess who must be locked up and kept away from those she liked best.

Since Sydney had not replied to any of his messages it was obvious that she hadn't received them; very likely her father had decided that he didn't want the daughter of the ruler of the nation to continue on friendly terms with a mere congressman; perhaps Nelson was planning a great and prosperous match for her, and he knew Sydney better than her father. She would not consent to marry a man she did not love.

She had almost promised herself to him when he went to Ireland. Now he believed that the mission to Ireland was a plot. Nelson had induced the government to send him to Europe so that he wouldn't see so much of Sydney.

The palace of Nelson had been turned into a fortress; very well; he would break into the fortress if he could not enter any other way.

That night he reconnoitred the neighborhood to see how he would achieve his purpose. Sydney, he knew, would be living in her cottage in the garden. He need not pass through the house; if he could get over the garden wall it would be a simple matter to approach the cottage.

The Nelson house and grounds occupied three-quarters of a city block on Fifth Avenue, extending from the avenue along two side streets, most of the way to Madison Avenue. The house was at the corner of Fifth, with the entrance on the side street. The garden wall, a stone structure about fifteen feet high, ran along the avenue and down the next north side street until it reached the rear wall of a high building on Madison Avenue.

MacGregor, who had been a soldier in the World War, though under the legal age, observed with dismay that the house and grounds were guarded very skillfully, if

unostentatiously. Two men were loitering on the sidewalk half a block down the street as he approached it; although they were in civilian clothes he saw by their manner that they were private policemen.

Along the park side of the avenue he counted four other men at intervals, also on guard. Two policemen in uniform stood at the entrance to the house, and as he passed along the sidewalk under the wall he saw two others who were patrolling the boundaries of the estate.

As he walked down the street at the rear of the grounds he saw three automobiles parked by the curb, and in each sat two or three men, obviously also private detectives. Evidently Nelson feared that the wall might be scaled by an assassin or an anarchist, equally deadly, and had taken precautions.

The big building at the rear was an office building, the property of Nelson, and it had been constructed so that the wall facing the garden was blank.

There were no office windows in it, no prying eyes could look down upon the beautiful grounds and observe whoever might be walking under the trees or along the gravel paths. One line of tiny windows broke the ugly monotony of the twenty story wall, evidently the lavatories, or corridor windows, and these were of opaque glass.

Although he had been in the grounds and inside the bungalow of Sydney, he had never noticed before how skillfully the place was protected from public view; never before had he the necessity of entering without an invitation.

He reached Madison Avenue in a condition of despondency. To go in by the main entrance was impossible. But getting over the wall was not to be managed; guards were everywhere. But there was one chance.

If he could get into the office building, conceal himself there until dark, then let himself down from one of the tiny windows by a rope ladder, he might land in the garden. That side was probably unguarded, because entrance from that building seemed impossible; for all he knew, it was,



The Chameleon

By JAMES PERLEY HUGHES

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

SPRAWLED upon the leather-back seat of the stage coach, a young man watched with lazy delight the play of the moonlight upon the sea of mesquite and chaparral, as the vehicle reeled its way across the open range. A mission lay before him; a mission that might cost him his life, yet at the moment he was enthralled by the serenity of the nocturnal scene.

The chill of the night air caused him to draw a blanket tighter, and before he realized it unwelcomed slumber gripped him. A fragment of a dream came in hazy clouds, but before he could more than glimpse the chimeras it unfolded, the vision was shattered.

Eyes that had been closed but a few minutes widened at the staccato sound of shots, and the stage came to a jerking halt. Instinctively his hands flew to his holsters. They were empty, but as he groped for the missing weapons he felt a circle of cold metal pressed against his temple.

"Stick 'em up!" The words came from a fellow passenger, a man who had entered the stage at its last stop.

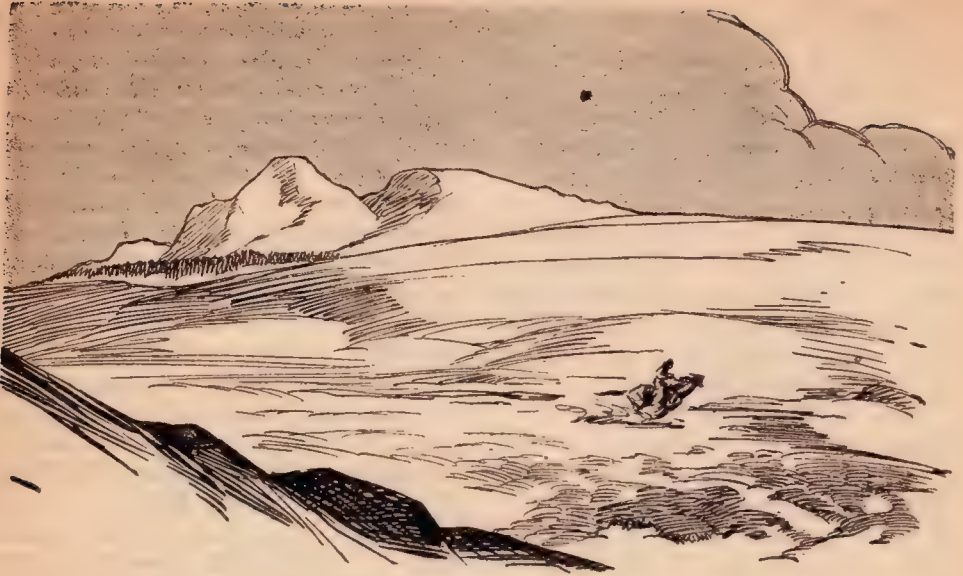
A tall figure pushed aside the curtains to look into the body of the coach, a menacing revolver held in either hand. The moonlight, shining through from the opposite side, lighted his face. Although a masking handkerchief covered the lower features, the eyes that looked from beneath the black sombrero were not entirely screened.

"Stick 'em up—higher—or I'll—" The tall man did not finish.

"You!"

The young man voiced the words in utter surprise, as his hands went higher still.

A shot roared in the cramped confines of the coach, and the speaker sank back upon the cushions, a crimson trickle stealing down his cheek. One weapon holstered, the bandit chief dragged his limp victim from the coach to lay him softly at the roadside.



"Get out of there and get busy." He turned to hurl the command at his aid within.

While their chief continued to hold the driver and frightened passengers at bay, other bandits quickly stripped their victims of their valuables. The strong box beneath the driver's seat was rifled with grunts of satisfaction at the rich loot it gave. The task completed, the men turned to their leader for further instructions.

"Drive—drive as if I were after you." The tall man mounted and took a rifle from his saddle bow. Its muzzle gestured to the stage driver, who snatched up his neglected reins. "Give my compliments to the sheriff, and tell him he had better get a company of Rangers if he is going to do business with me. Now drive!"

A shout, an imprecation, an uncoiling of the long whip, and the stage disappeared in the half light.

And now the bandit leader once more turned to the young man still lying by the roadside. A small red pool had formed upon the highway's dusty face, but a quick appraisal of the wound appeared to satisfy the outlaw.

"Tie him to that pack horse," he ordered. "Tie him so that his head won't hang."

"We don't want no dead man," one of

the robbers complained. "Let 'em lay where they fall. That's my motto."

"He isn't dead," the man answered. "If he were it would all be very simple. As it is, I've got to pay my debts. That done, we can start from scratch."

Carefully he adjusted the limp form to the forked pack saddle, as the others lashed it fast.

"Well, I got a few fat pokes inside," one of the men boasted, as they turned their horses in their leader's wake. "It was a quick job, and paid right handsome, except for the excess baggage the boss brought along. Wonder what he's going to do with him?"

No offer of information from the tall leader, and the little band rode silently across the range, followed by a patient pack horse, upon which was trussed the inanimate form of a young man, a tiny trickle still coming from the wound on his forehead.

II.

"ARE you feeling better this morning?" A girl smoothed back a wayward lock of light brown hair that fell across a bandaged temple.

The patient nodded soberly, his clear blue eyes looking deeply into the girl's brown ones, as though he sought to read

there an explanation of his presence amid unfamiliar surroundings. Strangely blue his eyes appeared, in marked contrast to his deep tanned face.

"I'm Betty Harrison," the young woman went on. "The doctor said last night that you could talk to-day. That is, if you feel like it."

"That's nice. Let's talk." His voice was soft and warm, the girl thought, and marked with an accent a trifle different from that used by the men of the range.

"What shall we talk about?"

"Anything you wish."

"Fine; then let's talk about you."

Betty smiled, then blushed.

"All right, if you can think of nothing more interesting."

"Where do you live?" he inquired, a quizzical smile tugging at his mouth corners.

"Why, here, of course. Did you think I was a visitor?"

"Where is here?"

"Why, on the ranch, to be sure." This with a puzzled expression, as if she did not comprehend these questionings.

"The ranch? What ranch?"

The brown eyes studied him soberly. Then pity dawned in their shadowed depths and again she smoothed back the wayward hair.

"How silly of me to forget," she exclaimed. "You don't remember, of course. The doctor said that it might be several days. You were shot when the stage was held up. It's a wonder you were not killed, Dr. Stedman says."

His hand—a strong, manly hand it was, tinted like all dwellers of that sun drenched region—rose to feel gingerly the bandage that wrapped his head. An expression of almost childish wonder came into his eyes as he returned the girl's inquiring gaze.

"Shot—in the holdup," he muttered, and then, as though interrogating himself, "shot in the stage holdup—what stage?"

"The Los Baños stage." She motioned to the glaring out of doors. "Over there—on the other side of the bad lands."

His eyes followed her gesture, wonderment written in their expression.

"And how did I get here?"

"Father found you in the yard—just inside the gate. There were tracks of four horses."

"Do you know who brought me here?"

Her head shook slowly in negation.

The door opened and a man and a woman entered. A glance told that they were the girl's parents. A heavy beard, gray streaked, swept down from the man's deeply weathered face, while the buxom mother bustled with busy alertness.

"How are you feeling this morning, stranger?" The rancher addressed the young man with hearty solicitude.

"I hope that Betty hasn't bothered you," the woman added, as she bent to rearrange the pillows. "She has always been itching to be a nurse, and probably now regards you as heaven sent to give her practice. Betty's always doing something. After one batch of magazines comes she decides on nursing. Next she wants to be a detective. Then she picks on art, while all the time I'm trying to make a reasonably good housekeeper out of her."

"And I've been trying to train her to look after the ranch," the father added. "Some of these days she'll have to take it over, and it's about time she learned something of the business. She's the only child we have. We lost our son."

The man stopped to gaze upon the patient for a moment, as though to learn his calling.

"By the way, stranger, I don't believe you've told us your name. If you have, it's entirely slipped my mind."

The blue eyes of the young man went from one to the other of the three gathered at his bedside. The puzzled frown returned as he seemed to grope for an answer.

"I'm Scott Harrison," the rancher went on encouragingly. "This is my wife, Matilda. I suppose Betty has introduced herself."

"She has been very kind to me—you are all very kind."

"And now that you know our names—"

"My name?" The groping expression once more came into the bewildered blue eyes.

"Yes—your name."

"Why—I—" Again his hand sought his bandaged forehead.

"He's forgotten everything," Betty broke in. "He doesn't even know how he got here or where he is. He can't remember the holdup or anything."

"Poor boy, poor boy!" Mrs. Harrison bent to smooth back his hair, maternal solicitude sounding in every syllable.

"Even forgotten his name—his own name?" Scott Harrison turned an unbelieving gaze toward his daughter.

"Even his own name," she echoed.

"I've read of such things—in books," the rancher mumbled, "but dog my cats, I never thought—"

He halted as heavy knocking on the outside door announced a visitor to that isolated ranch house.

"Wonder who that is?" Harrison rose to answer the summons.

Voices raised in argument came through the door as Mrs. Harrison joined her husband. The eyes of the girl flashed a look, fear-frighted, the young man thought, as their glances met. Then she joined her father and mother.

A moment later a professional appearing man entered the sick clamber. His beard was trimmed to Vandyke point, and eyeglasses with flowing black ribbons added to the ensemble of a typical medical practitioner of the rangeland. Behind followed the members of the Harrison family, anxiety graven upon each face.

"Well, how is the patient this morning?" was the unctuous inquiry.

"Fine, thank you, doctor," the young man's eyes were fixed upon the visitor, "but you are not—"

"No—I am Dr. Stedman's assistant. He was delayed this morning—unavoidably."

A black instrument case, the invariable hand luggage of the country doctor, was placed at the foot of the bed. From it he took a clinical thermometer.

"No fever," was his pronouncement, after reading the thermometer.

Next, he felt the pulse beat, consulting a heavy gold watch, as his finger sought the patient's wrist.

"Perfectly normal," was the verdict, as he laid the timepiece on a small table.

"Feeling fine." This from the bed.

"But Mr. and Mrs. Harrison tell me that you have forgotten everything." The visitor turned gray eyes upon the patient, eyes that seemed to bore into the man who lay before him. "What is the last thing you recall?"

A dazed look, an expression of utter bewilderment.

"Why—er—I—don't—"

"He has forgotten everything. Even his name," Betty Harrison was quick to interpolate.

A shout from the outside and the visitor leaped to his feet, then dashed out of the room. Once more came heavy knocking upon the Harrison door and the man and his wife hastened to respond to the new summons.

The fear that had shown in Betty's brown eyes grew to terror as she heard voices raised in the adjoining room. A moment later, the door once more opened and this time Dr. Stedman entered.

"I would have been here sooner," he began, as he took a chair beside the bed, "but for that dad binged road agent. He—"

He stopped as his glance encountered the instrument case at the foot of the bed.

"How did that get here?" he demanded.

"Why, your assistant—he's in the other room now," the patient began.

"I have no assistant." The physician's eyes roved to fix upon the heavy gold watch upon the table. "And that's my watch. Where are my glasses? The road agent took them, not four hours ago. Road agents fairly own this country and the sheriff can't do a thing. Said he would send for the Rangers, but I reckon they are too busy rounding up sheep herders crossing the line or playing tag with the greasers. They haven't time to save folks' lives and property."

His wrathful eyes glared from one to the other to fix themselves upon Mrs. Harrison.

"Where is this man who calls himself my assistant? Find him and you have found the road agent. Where is he?"

"He rode away when you came," the woman stammered. "He said that he was in a hurry."

Dr. Stedman stood in the middle of the

room, scratching his head reflectively, as he pondered over the mystery.

"By the blue-nosed prophet," he exploded, "posed as my assistant—fooled everybody—stole my case, my watch—my glasses—just to make it real. Trimmed his beard, I bet. By the ox-eyed Queen of Sheba, I bet that man was—"

"Who?" Betty Harrison and the young man asked the question in a single voice.

"The Chameleon."

III.

THE patient's recovery was surprisingly rapid. A day or two later, with Betty as his guide, he walked about the Harrison homestead, inspecting the barns, corrals and bunk house with eyes entirely familiar with similar surroundings. After an active morning, the two rested in the shade of a tree whose far-flung branches upheld a hammock that the girl claimed as her very own. Near by was a rustic table and chairs.

"If you have even forgotten your name," Betty said, as she gestured the man toward the hammock seat, "we shall have to pick one for you. A man can't go around without a name. I think picking one would be thrilling. Every one else has a name thrust upon them, but to be able to select your own—I wish I had the chance."

Her hand reached for one of the many magazines that adorned the table top. Quickly, she thumbed the pages.

"Here's a good one." She paused to look up with calculating eyes, as though she weighed both name and personality and found them in true balance. "How would you like to be Rodney Leveque?"

"Rodney," the man stiffened. "Never do at all. Leveque? Too Frenchy and besides it means a bishop—nothing episcopal about me."

"Then you do remember—some things," the girl eyed him seriously.

"Some things."

"Well—here's Harold Hemmingway. How's that?"

"Hemmingway!"

"What's the matter with that?"

"Cow-punchers would be calling me 'Humming Bird' before sundown."

"Well—you suggest something."

"What's the matter with Bill Smith?"

"Bill Smith!" It was her turn to voice indignation. "Bill Smith! Why, that is as common as mesquite and there's nothing romantic about it. I like romantic names."

"It suits me—especially as I'm going to bed down in the bunk house to-night. Bill Smith it is then."

"Have your own way." Betty was just a little impatient. "Men generally do, but if I were picking names, Bill Smith would be the last I'd fix on."

That evening saw Bill Smith desert the starched sheets of the guest room to take up with the blankets of the bunk house and for several days Betty Harrison saw nothing of him. Tales from the range and corral, borne imperfectly by the twisted tongue of Sing Wah, the chuck wagon cook, told of Bill Smith's entrance into the carefree society of the range riders.

That the men did not hesitate to put their new companion through a series of tests was evidenced by these stories, but Sing Wah's recital of the invariably triumphant success of the visitor, strained the credulity of the ranch house.

"He shootee six-gun mo' bettah than Missouri Manley," asserted the cook with as near enthusiasm as a Chinese ever attains, "and thlows lope mo' bettah than Hally Higgins."

"Fancy with the lariat?" Scott Harrison asked, skeptically.

"Can do," Sing Wah confirmed.

"And beats Mr. Manley with the shooting irons?" Betty's brown eyes were unbelieving.

"Can do!"

"Then Bill Smith is the man I've been hunting," Harrison announced. "I've been looking for a good foreman ever since Charlie left us and if he can out-shoot, out-ride and out-rope that parcel of mavericks that call themselves cow-punchers—"

"Can do," asserted Sing Wah.

Out on the range rode Bill Smith, the newly appointed foreman of the Winged-O, and wide were his circlings. Hardly a spot in the far-flung countryside was left unvisited by this tireless rider and days there were when he disappeared to return with

little groups of yearlings and a story of driving off suspicious horsemen that had been edging into the districts where the Harrison cattle ran.

Tales of his prowess continued to drift into the ranch house and Betty Harrison felt a pique annoy her that before had been a stranger to her sunny disposition. The companionship that had begun with the stranger's illness had waxed during his convalescence and she missed his stimulating presence. Sometimes, she saddled her colorful pinto to ride out to that uncharted sea of rolling range and more than once she met the man who called himself Bill Smith.

"Do you know, Miss Harrison," he said, one evening after he had encountered her far from the homestead, "if I were you, I don't believe I would come out this far unless some one else was along. I saw some of the Circle-Bar men up by Dead Horse water hole and they told me that the Apaches were getting mighty hostile and are threatening to leave the reservation."

"Apaches? What's the trouble?"

"Some one has been stirring them up. A new medicine man or something. They are getting more warlike every day."

"Then they had better get those Rangers up here that the sheriff has been fussing about so much. Don't you think they ought to do something?"

"Yes—they ought to mosey along, if they are going to do anything."

"Still, I wouldn't be afraid if you were with me." Betty Harrison glanced coquettishly from beneath her wide-brimmed hat.

The blue eyes of the rider returned her gaze seriously. Then his glance dropped to twin revolvers attached to either side of his saddle horn, and he fingered the weapons, almost caressingly, Betty thought.

"You won't go riding out in this neck of the woods without some one with you, will you?" he asked.

"Why?"

"Things are liable to happen."

"Things?"

"Yes—things—just things."

"Indians?"

"I don't know much about them. Only what I heard up at the water hole, but there's something else that—"

"The Chameleon?"

He looked up as a sudden fright came into her voice. Or was it anxiety? He puzzled over it before he replied.

"Maybe it is the Chameleon—I'd like to know for sure. I'm going to find out, if possible."

A swift intaking of the girl's breath and then her former poise returned.

"I hope somebody finds out," she said.

"Somebody will," he answered.

And they rode homeward, each with thoughts inward turned.

IV.

NIGHT saw the man whom the Winged-O knew as Bill Smith seated in a corner of the bunk house near an open window. His head was lowered like one in profound thought and scant was the heed he paid to the noisy clatter of the cowboys.

Their after-supper conversation died slowly, but one after the other, the men finished their final cigarettes and crawled into their bunks. Still Bill Smith sat by the window.

"Must be in love," Texas Thatcher whispered guardedly to his bunkie, Ham Johnson, with a gesture at their newly appointed foreman. "Look at the way he is eying the moon. He'll sigh next—they always do, when they are in love."

A sigh, deep and doleful from the window, where the light of the half moon partially illumined the clear-cut features of the foreman.

"Didn't I tell you?" Thatcher almost giggled.

But Ham Johnson refused to be intrigued further by sighs and moonlight and soon was snoring gustily. A muttered oath or two and Thatcher joined him in the land of dreams.

Still Bill Smith sat by the window, peering into the dim argent light outside. From across the mesa came the distant howl of coyotes, those wolves of the rangeland who slink silently by day, yet at night vent a chorus of lupine howlings as though they sought to make the world believe that the whole out-of-doors was teeming with their tribe.

And now—the distant hooting of an owl.

Bill Smith straightened, suddenly alert. The call was the deep mellow note of the timber owl, a species unknown in the range-land where only the screech of the prairie night bird is heard. Another doleful hoot.

The man arose, tense and waiting. Quickly, he extinguished the last light within the bunk house and softly drew off his high-heeled boots.

Now the hooting note was answered. From near at hand came the reply, high and shrill in its intonation. The man's eyes peered through the half light toward the ranch house as the mournful cry again sounded through the cottonwood trees that surrounded the Harrison home. He strained to penetrate the shadows that clung so closely, seeking the source of that answering call.

A stir in the horse corral and he reached for his revolvers, slipping them into his belt holsters as he stole for the door. Around the bunk house he crept, flattening himself against the adobe wall that his figure might be swallowed in the shadows thrown down by the overhanging roof.

As he peered around the corner, he cautiously raised one of his weapons, his eyes traveling along its barrel.

An exclamation—suddenly muffled—and he lowered the gun.

In the half moon's pale light, he saw a slender figure enter the corral and rope with expert ease a galloping pinto, a pinto that Betty Harrison alone rode. Gravely, he watched her throw a light saddle upon the animal's back, cinching it with well-trained hand. In another moment, she had opened the corral gate and rode off through the night toward the open range, the range whence plainly came the hoot of the owl.

Bill Smith's stockinged feet raced to the harness room where he snatched a short rope length from its wooden peg. Back in the corral, he twisted a knot about the nose of his own horse, mounting with catlike ease. Saddleless, he rode rangeward in the wake of the girl, his eyes wide open and ears intently listening.

From far to the right he heard once more the owl's doleful call, the sound receding as the girl advanced over the uneven

ground. The answering note now sounded in front of him and he smiled grimly as he noticed its decidedly feminine note.

Slowly he rode, his figure lying flat upon his horse's back. Carefully he avoided the low divides that would throw him in silhouette against the half-lighted sky.

Now he was drawing closer to the hooting owl as though the bird no longer was leading its followers on. The calls of the two drew closer and, as he stopped and listened with held-in breath, he could distinguish the sound of voices.

Bill Smith turned his horse down a coulee and tethered him to a chaparral shrub, his unbooted feet stealing toward the spot whence the sound of voices came. Gingerly, he picked his way, avoiding the clumps of cactus that would have crippled him had he stepped upon their thorny spines.

And now he crept down the dry bed of an arroyo to stop almost beneath them. Squatting behind a bowlder, he saw the slender figure of Betty Harrison silhouetted against the pale moon's orb. Before her was a man, tall, broad-shouldered. Only snatches of their talk was audible, but he could tell that the stranger was voicing importunities which the girl sturdily refused to consider.

"Father says that if you ever set foot upon the ranch again, he'll—" a puff of the night breeze swept the words to him, each syllable distinct.

"You wouldn't let him do that?" the man interrupted. "You know that—"

The breeze died and Bill Smith missed the remainder of the sentence.

And now the man increased his entreaties, his arms reaching out to the girl like a lover pleading his suit. Bill Smith's hand stole toward his holster and then he snatched it back with a grim hardening of his lips.

"I won't! I won't!" he heard Betty's voice raised, vociferating her refusal.

"You little—" the man's hands snatched at her.

The girl's next act was as surprising to Bill Smith as to the man who stood before her. A flash and the heavy end of her horse-hair quirt struck him full in the face. Backward he reeled, swearing.

"Just for that!" the man gestured for his guns, but Betty had fled into the night, as Bill Smith's ready weapon leveled upon the tall figure outlined against the sky.

The man had turned and for the first time, Smith was able to see his profile. Beneath a Ranger's hat was a straight, regular nose and heavy mustache. His beard was pointed. Pointed like—Bill Smith centered his thoughts to find simile to fit that arrowlike beard tip.

"Like the doctor—the doctor, who—"

Then as a flash of revelation came:

"The Chameleon!"

His hands dropped to his guns and he started up the small creek bank, but as his eyes lifted, he found himself—alone.

V.

"You said that you did not want me to ride out on the range alone." Betty Harrison found Bill Smith cinching his girths for a day in the saddle.

It was seldom that the girl was about the corral at that early hour, but the morning sun was just rising from the dusty green sea of mesquite when she appeared.

"I did not say that 'I wanted' anything," the man replied, somewhat coolly, the girl thought. "I said 'I hoped' that you would not ride very far alone."

"Oh!" And then with an intriguing flash of the brown eyes, "I would very much like to ride up toward Dead Horse water hole this morning, but I do not want to go alone, especially when you think there is liable to be trouble."

He released his hold upon the cinch band to study those flashing brown eyes. Innocent and guileless they were in the morning light. In them, too, was just a touch of fear, yet he had followed her only a few nights before into the open range whither she had ridden in answer to strange hootings that were not the call of the owl.

"Perhaps your father will order one of the men to go with you," he suggested, rather sternly, Betty thought. "Texas Thompson is not doing anything special this morning. Perhaps he—"

"I wouldn't ride a yard with Tex Thompson," the girl retorted, almost hotly.

"He's silly—maudlinly silly—and besides—"

She hesitated, her dark eyes holding his with their appealing glance.

"And besides?" he prompted.

A swift flow of color over the sun-tinted cheek and then:

"I heard father say at breakfast this morning that you were going up toward the water hole to inspect the range. He thought perhaps you would move the beef herd up there if there is plenty of grass."

This very archly.

"I didn't know that you got up in time to have breakfast with your father," he said with just a touch of sarcasm, although he realized that he was weakening rapidly.

She ignored the thrust and continued:

"So I thought perhaps that you wouldn't mind if I went along."

A question rose in his mind, but he repressed it.

"You wouldn't mind, would you, Mr. Smith?"

Brown eyes and blue held each other for a moment.

"Of course I don't mind. I shall be delighted, as the society folks say," and, as new thought struck him: "There are several things that I wanted to look into between here and there. You wouldn't mind if we went a little out of our way, would you?"

"Of course not," she repeated his own words. "I shall be delighted."

Betty's colorful pinto was ready almost before he had finished cinching the double girths to his own saddle and together they galloped through the brisk morning air.

Instead of taking a direct line toward Dead Horse water hole, Bill Smith directed his mount along the line taken by Betty the night the owl hooted so mournfully, calling her to follow him across the pathless range.

Side by side they rode over the land that each had traversed by the light of a waning moon, the girl sparkling with the intoxication of that rare morning. But the man was deep sunk in thoughts, thoughts and questions that importunately demanded answers before he could go on with the work before him.

"Funny, isn't it?" the man began after they had ridden to a point near the scene of the night adventure. "Funny, isn't it? Everything has its own mark, its own footprint. A signature, you might call it, telling that it had been somewhere—attesting to its presence, although the word of man might be to the contrary."

"How—what do you mean?" The girl's glance was filled with frank amazement.

"Take Calico—that pinto of yours—for instance," Bill Smith replied. "He's shod all around, but the fore right shoe has been worn down until it leaves a funny little mark wherever he goes. I have noticed it, coming off the range sometimes. I could tell that you had been out there and was returning home ahead of me."

She studied him for a moment, first in wonderment and then as though she sought the motive that prompted his words.

"That sounds like some of the stories I have read in the magazines," she finally said. "Go on and tell me more about it."

He rode for a short distance, his eyes down-turned, closely examining the faint trail they were following.

"There!" His quick eyes had picked up one of Calico's distinguishing hoofprints. "There—see—I can tell that you have been out in this direction. Not more than two or three days ago. The cleanness of the print shows that."

This with great seriousness, after a simulation of careful study.

Betty Harrison swiftly reined her mount and swept from the saddle. Carefully she examined the mark on the sandy dust, and then lifted Calico's right forefoot.

"You're right." This with a sudden in-taking of breath. "That is Calico's print." And then, as a new thought came to her: "Come—let's be turning toward Dead Horse water hole if we are going to get there this morning."

And now, in turn, the man studied the girl, seeking to brush aside the frank smile that greeted his glance and learn if she already suspected his reason for leading her in this direction.

"We have plenty of time," he temporized. "Let's go on—just to see if we can follow Calico's trail."

A toss of a girlish head, half in vexation, and then:

"All right, Mr. Detective. Let's follow Calico's trail."

On they rode, Smith pointing to additional imprints of the pinto's hoofs.

"You got off here"—he indicated a group of marks—"and tied him to that chaparral shrub. There are your steps leading up there."

His gesture indicated the bank of a little dry creek.

No word from the girl. She was now lagging behind.

"Look"—the man found other hoofprints that intrigued him—"you met some one here." Then, with a motion of his quirt to a spot where two had stood: "See—it was a man. His footprints are much larger than yours, and he smoked corn-husk cigarettes."

He turned, to see her eying him closely, while a flood of color crimsoned her cheek. Now her eyes took on an expression of searching inquiry, as though she sought to assay him in a new rôle.

She slipped from her horse, dropping the reins so that the well trained beast would not stray, and then climbed the small eminence that was the scene of her nocturnal meeting. Carefully she studied the footprints that he had pointed out, but paid scant heed to his added words of explanation.

"Who was the man?" Bill Smith asked bluntly.

Once more fright appeared in the large brown eyes. No answer to his pointed inquiry.

"If he were your sweetheart, why didn't you have him come to the house?" He studied her closely as he voiced his interrogation.

Deeper, still deeper, came the color upon her cheek, but the brown eyes looked frankly into his.

"I have no sweetheart."

A throb of gladness as she spoke these words.

"Then who was he?"

No answer.

"A brother?"

"I have no brother. You heard father

say that I was an only child. What difference does it make, anyhow?"

This in challenge. He longed to answer her, to tell her many reasons, to tell her that already he wanted to be the man whom she would ride far to meet; but he repressed the words, and once more pointed pragmatically to the hoofprints in the sandy soil.

"Rode an unshod horse about fifteen hands high," he went on. "Left hind hoof was split, but healed, while the left fore was recently trimmed. I'll not have any trouble in picking up that trail."

The girl had drawn away and was exploring the arroyo in which he had hidden the night he spied upon her meeting.

"Look here," she called.

He descended the sharp bank to join her.

"Some one else has been here." She pointed to footprints in the dry bed of the tiny creek that flowed there during the wet season. "Some one besides me has been visiting this place. He wore no boots. See the mark of his stocking feet. Why, I—"

She looked up, to see a flush sweep over the man's deeply tanned cheeks. A flash of intuition, and the smile that had curved her lips hardened into a firm, straight line.

"Take off your right boot and step here, beside that other mark."

Bill Smith hesitated. To refuse would place him in a position where everything might be ruined. To obey would open still another avenue of possibilities. He hesitated, then made a quick decision. Her reaction might tell him far more than words. Off came the boot, and his foot implanted a print beside the one she was examining so studiously.

Minutely she compared the two impressions. The marks of clumsy darning, his own handiwork, attracted her attention. They left twin prints—identical in every respect. He felt his cheeks, his forehead, his ears burning with hot shame, as the brown eyes looked up.

"Then it was you who followed me?" Her voice was soft, untinted by emotion, and he marveled at her poise.

He nodded guiltily.

"Why?"

3 A

Confusion seemed to sweep over him, changing Bill Smith from a man in whose hands a delicate situation rested into a fumbling being who had lost his advantage to a superior foe.

"I can't tell you—not now," he stammered.

"Until you can, I shall ride where I please—alone." Betty Harrison mounted her patient pinto and gathered her reins slowly. "Please do not follow me again. I can look after myself."

Calico whirled in response to the pressure of her knees, and she galloped away, leaving Smith standing there dumfounded at the swift turn of events.

VI.

DAYS followed that were brimmed with activity for Bill Smith—days in which he turned his attention to the cares of a newly appointed ranch foreman to the exclusion of other things. Plans for the beef round-up were rapidly maturing, and it was only after partially revealing his reasons to Scott Harrison that he was able to conduct further investigations. More rumors of activity on the part of Apaches drifted down those devious trails that scar the range land about the water holes, and apprehension was beginning to find lodgment in the Winged-O homestead.

"Father and I went through some of that Indian trouble in the old days when we first filed on this land," Mrs. Harrison explained when they were discussing the possibility of an uprising. "We know what it means when the Apaches get on the warpath. We had cavalry out here then, and Hugh Scott—he's a general now—Captain Scott could do more to soothe a parcel of Apaches than a squadron of cavalry. I wish he were here now, for there isn't a dozen troopers within five hundred miles."

"They ought to get those Rangers here that have been promised to the sheriff," Betty's father added.

"Do you really look for trouble?"

"Look for it!" Scott Harrison exclaimed. "We have it without looking for it. With this Chameleon road agent romping around

the county and a prospect of an Apache uprising, I don't think that we'll have to look very far."

"Wonder what has become of the Chameleon?" Smith mused audibly.

The rancher's eyes focused upon his foreman for a moment before he answered. Shrewd was the glance of the elder man—a glance that assayed Bill Smith with the wisdom that years upon the frontier bring.

"I reckon he'll break out before long," was the elder man's reply. "He hasn't bothered the stage much of late because there's been mighty little travel, but wait until the Los Baños mines make another shipment of bullion. We'll hear from him then, or I'm mightily mistaken."

"When does the mine ship?"

"They're keeping the date a secret. Martin, the superintendent, told me that they didn't want to take any more chances than necessary, and when they do they are going to see that Seth Roberts has a straight and fast shooter up on the box with him. They are not going to stand a heavy loss, you can lay a bet on that."

Following this conversation Bill Smith took to the range with even greater frequency. There were sections of the bad lands seldom visited by either cow-punchers or miners that attracted his attention, and through these desolate wastes he rode, searching for a spot that his reason told him must exist. A tall butte, far to the south, intrigued his attention, but a survey of its sheer sides showed no way by which it could be scaled.

Sight of a lonely Indian riding through the waste attracted his roving eyes on the third day of his search, and determinedly he spurred his horse in the redskin's wake, as the rider disappeared over a low divide almost at the base of the giant butte; but when he reached the hill's summit all trace of the rider was lost.

Bill Smith's knowledge of tracking availed him little, for the trail of the unshod horse the redskin rode was lost in the drifting sands before he had gone half a mile.

Undaunted, Bill Smith centered his attention upon this section of the country. Permission for a week's absence was grant-

ed by Scott Harrison, and the foreman of the Winged-O loaded a packhorse to take with him upon his journey. It was while he was cinching the diamond hitch that held the load to the wooden saddle that Betty Harrison entered the corral.

"Father tells me that you are going away for a week," she began.

It was their first conversation since her discovery that it was he who followed her the night that the owl called so pleadingly.

"Yes—I thought I'd do a little hunting," he replied.

"Hunting? What is there to hunt around here?"

"Lots of things."

"In the bad lands?"

"Bad lands!" Her frank question came as a shock. He had confided in no one that he was going into that section. "What makes you think that I am going into the bad lands?"

"Why are you taking so much water with you?" she cross queried, pointing to the pack horse's burden. "That's the only place around here where the water is not fit to drink. There are holes there that a horse will use, but not a man. Any one could tell that you were going into the bad lands if they looked at that outfit."

"Yes, I am going into the bad lands," he admitted, piqued at the girl's deductive genius.

"Hunting?"

He nodded, still further vexed by her penetrating questionings.

"Then you must be a naturalist looking for some rare type of rattlesnake, horned toad, or Gila monster. That's all the game you will find in the bad lands."

"Perhaps I shall find something else," he retorted, his eyes fixed upon her.

"I doubt it." Betty Harrison's gaze frankly met his, and she turned to pass through the corral gate and take to the path toward the ranch house.

Halfway there she looked back to see him still watching her.

"Good hunting! The best of luck, Mr. Smith," she called as she stopped at the door and then hurried into the house.

Bill Smith's eyes remained focused upon the door after the girl had disappeared.

"I wonder," he muttered, but he brushed the thought aside as the intricacies of the diamond hitch demanded his undivided attention, and a few minutes later he was riding in the direction of the huge butte that overlooked the bad lands, and in his wake plodded a heavily laden pack horse.

The days that followed were trying ones for Bill Smith. Every effort proved fruitless until the fourth day, when he discovered a water hole screened by high rocks near the base of the unscalable butte. Here he found hoof and footprints that bore evidence of recent origin.

Sunrise of the next day saw him secreted high in the rocks that encircled the pool, watching through field glasses for any sign of life in the surrounding desolate wastes. One hour dragged by, then another. The third was even longer, but as the sun neared its noontide course his vigil was rewarded.

Far to the south he saw a rider approaching. Through his field glasses he could make out that the horseman was a blanketed Indian.

As the oncoming rider descended into a draw Smith lost sight of him, but his attention was now attracted by a cloud of dust far to the east. Another horseman was on his way to the water hole.

He turned his glasses in that direction, focusing the lenses upon the figure that rose and fell with the movement of the horse, but a flurry of sand, stirred by a wind puff, obscured his vision.

Again the rider from the south came in sight, descending the crest that led to the water hole. A few minutes later his horse was drinking greedily.

Bill Smith started as he saw the Indian take binoculars from his blanket fold and eagerly scan the eastern horizon. He, too, directed his glasses in that direction, to find the second horseman now crossing a low hill.

"Holy smoke!" he gasped, as he focused upon the horse.

It was Calico, the colorful pinto invariably ridden by Betty Harrison.

He turned his lenses upon the rider. It was the girl from the Winged-O ranch.

His eyes followed her, as swiftly she approached the waiting Indian and dismount-

ed. The redskin held out a hand in greeting, but from his position in the rocks above them Smith could see that the girl declined it.

Then followed what the man who watched them took to be a quarrel, in which hot words flew on both sides. At times the gestures of the girl told that she was seeking a favor, while the movement of the blanketed figure was that of a man refusing, regretfully. Then in turn the savage seemed to be beseeching her aid, and the girl in turn refused.

Anger was shown on each side, the red man gesturing to the revolvers he carried at his belt. As he threw back his blanket to display his weapons, Bill Smith took up his rifle and ran his eye along the sights. To kill the redman would have been an easy task at so short a range.

The quarrel by the water hole ended as quickly as it begun. Evidently impatient at the girl's replies to his importunities, the Indian flung himself upon his horse and galloped off—quirting the speeding brute at every leap. He did not turn to the south, whence he came, but lashed his steed eastward.

Betty Harrison leaped into her own saddle as though to follow the fast disappearing savage. Then she sharply spun the agile Calico upon his heels.

From his place in the rocks Bill Smith watched her circle around until she found his own horse tethered. He smiled grimly as he saw her dismount to follow his partially obscured tracks in the sands. He rose as she approached his hiding place.

"I thought perhaps that I would find you somewhere about here," was her greeting.

"And now, perhaps, you can tell me something about—" he began; his mind racing at the possibilities the situation contained.

"Not now—" She spoke with sudden energy, as though the element of time had only dawned upon her. "Hurry—get into your saddle—the Los Baños stage—shipment day at the mines—they are already after it—hurry—hurry—"

He was running toward his horse before she had opportunity to finish. In another

moment he was astride, spurring after the Indian who had disappeared over a divide. Hardly more than a mile and he lost the trail. He halted, to await her coming.

"This way," she called, reining Calico to the right, "we'll take a short cut."

He spun his horse around to follow her.

"Hurry—hurry," she called back. "We may be too late."

VII.

ON they raced, the girl picking up a half-marked trail that soon led them out of the bad lands. Over one divide they charged, and then after a dash over a shallow draw they raced up another slope, Calico setting a pace that called for the best efforts of the horse that Smith was riding. Now they were crossing the last high ground that stood between them and the rough highway along which the Los Baños stage was to carry the bullion shipment of the mines.

The man watched the girl as gracefully she rode over the rough land, admiring the horsemanship that years in the saddle had developed. Driving Calico at a furious pace, she rode with a cool confidence that would have earned the plaudits of the most skilled equestrians. And as his eyes were held upon her, he saw the speeding pinto suddenly pitch forward.

He half expected to see the girl hurled from her saddle, but she sharply reined her mount as he disengaged his hoof from the snake hole into which it had plunged. A painful limp or two and Calico stood still, trembling with pain, his right foreleg badly wrenched.

The man dashed up beside her and dismounted.

"Take my horse," he urged.

"Go on—go on," she begged, gesturing toward the hill top. "No time to lose. The stage will be along in a few minutes, and—"

"Perhaps he will carry double."

"No—no—hurry—hurry."

"I am not going to leave you here." He seized her arm. "Not with these Indians riding the country, and—"

"Never mind me!" Panic was in her voice as she broke away from his grasp. "Hurry—ride as fast as you can—I'll follow on foot. Please—please."

Her urge for speed, the possibility of combat, the nearing fruition of his plans infected him with her enthusiasm, and he swung once more into the saddle. Spurring up the hill, he looked down into the valley through which the stage road wound. The lumbering vehicle, drawn by six horses, was just coming over a crest of a hill to the north.

Then his eyes were attracted by galloping figures charging through the mesquite, figures that were blanket wrapped. He spurred down the hill in pursuit.

"Apaches!" The word escaped him as he saw the riders racing toward the on-coming stage.

In another moment the redskins had surrounded the coach, their galloping horses forming a circle that drew nearer and nearer to the vehicle. Puffs of rifle fire came from the stage top, as the driver and guard who rode beside him shot to drive off the attackers. More than one of the redskins slipped from his horse, but as Smith charged on he saw the men on the box drop their weapons and stand, their hands held skyward.

There came a swarming of passengers from the coach body as the Indians halted their animals and began a systematic search of their victims, the work directed by a tall redskin, who remained seated upon his horse. Bill Smith's keen eyes told him that the colorful blanket worn by the chief was the same as that which had wrapped the Indian with whom Betty had a quarrel after a meeting at the water hole.

Question upon question linking these two whirled through his mind as he charged on. Then a bullet whistled over his head, and he dismissed this self-interrogation for the grimmer game of combat.

Betty Harrison climbed the crest of the hill behind which her beloved pinto had fallen. Quickly she swept the scene with eyes accustomed to the distances of the rangeland. To her left she beheld the opening of a drama that was of the West—the West in which she was born and reared; old, yet ever new and filled with the thrills of life and death—the struggle between good and evil.

In the foreground she saw Bill Smith as he drove home his spurs to race toward the

scene of action. Fascinated, she watched him thundering down the hillside, rushing to take a part in the drama that was moving so swiftly before her eyes.

From the back of his charging animal she saw spurts of smoke as his rifle spoke, and a moment later the sharp crack of the explosion reached her ears. A dozen shots and he threw the weapon to the ground, its duty done. And now she saw him drawing his revolvers from his saddle holsters as his horse charged on.

Several of the blanketed forms about the stage turned at the sound of his shots, some scrambling up on their horses and charging to meet his onslaught. Now their revolvers spat forth white, feathery puffs of smoke, and fainter came the sound of their firing.

The girl's Spartan spirit longed to be there, riding stride for stride with the man who was dashing on to battle. She, too, would take part in that struggle that was developing before her eyes.

Standing there alone upon the hilltop, she felt useless, impotent—down there she could at least lend some aid instead of being a mere spectator to a drama in which she had so vital an interest.

With unslackened speed Bill Smith charged on, still firing. One of the Indians pitched to the ground, and Betty thrilled at his daring and marksmanship. Missouri Manley could not have equaled that shot, fired from the back of a galloping horse that was traversing uneven ground in wild leaps that made a seat in the saddle uncertain except to a skilled rider.

On, on he raced, his fire increasing as he drew closer to the redskins. And now the girl's widening eyes saw the horse upon which he rode reel drunkenly, as though struck a powerful blow. Painfully the gallant animal gathered itself, and, with his rider still shooting, staggered on toward the scene of conflict. Then the brave beast collapsed, his life surrendered as gallantly he carried his master to the battle.

Behind the fallen body of his horse Bill Smith knelt to reload his empty revolvers, the Indians, who had ridden out to meet him, circling in their endeavor to attack him behind the fortress of his dead mount's body.

Bill Smith arose, the weapons in both hands blazing. And as he fired, another of the Apaches reeled in his saddle and then slipped helplessly to the ground. The remaining savage whirled his horse and dashed back to his companions.

Unhorsed, but undaunted, Bill Smith dashed for the beleagured stage on foot. The little band of redskins half turned to meet his charge, but as they did the driver and his companion upon the box dropped hands that had been held high and snatched up their revolvers.

With both of Bill Smith's guns in rapid action and the fire from the stage top coming from the rear, the remaining Indians spun their horses and dashed off in mad flight. But two remained with the tall chief who directed their attack. The remainder of the band was stretched upon the ground, either dead or wounded.

"Thank you kindly, stranger," Seth Roberts, the stage driver, was still voicing his appreciation of Bill Smith's efforts when Betty arrived, panting from her run down the hill, to join the little knot that had gathered about the Winged-O foreman, and were now giving tongue to gratitude. "I don't know exactly what we would have done if it hadn't been for you. The mine would sure have been hard hit, as we've the bullion of more than two months' clean up there in the boot."

Bill Smith's face reddened as others crowded near to shake his hand. Then his eyes encountered Betty's, and he sighed with relief.

"You'd better give your thanks to her." He gestured toward the girl. "She—she saw them before I did, as we came over the divide. I wouldn't have seen them at all, probably, and so she's the one to thank."

"Thankee, lady," Seth Roberts looked at her for a moment, and then exclaimed: "Why, it's Betty Harrison, of the Winged-O. Thank you kindly, Betty. Then this two-gun man must be that new foreman of your daddy's that we have been hearing so much about."

Once more he directed his words to Bill Smith.

"Mighty glad to have you here, stranger," he said. "I reckon this country

needs a couple of six guns like those you tote. What shall I call you, stranger?"

"Bill Smith."

"Well, Bill, the drinks are shore on me the first time we are handy to a man's sized bar." Then, turning to the passengers: "This is Bill Smith, gentlemen. If it hadn't been for him, them tarnation redskins would have—"

"Redskins!" Bill Smith stooped over the outstretched form of one of the blan-keted bandits.

His finger scraped across the grimy face of the dead man.

In its wake appeared a streak of white.

"Oh!" The girl's voice broke the deadly quiet that wrapped the wide-eyed spectators.

"Redskins!" repeated Bill Smith, as he gestured to the streak from which he had scraped the disguising paint. "I could tell they were not Indians from a mile away. Who ever saw an Apache riding with a roping saddle? Who ever saw an Indian using a six gun when there was a rifle within forty miles that he could steal? There isn't an Indian in the whole drove of them."

"Then who are these varmints?" Seth Roberts fixed amazed eyes upon the foreman of the Winged-O. "Who are these road agents who are holding up stages when the Rangers ought to be here protecting our lives and property?"

"I don't know for sure—I don't know any of these." Bill Smith's hand indicated several of the fallen men. "But I think I know who is the boss of this special tribe of varmints. He made his get-away, but if you look at the prints made by his horse you'll find that one hoof has been split and healed and another recently trimmed. He's been right busy around these parts lately. I think you've met him."

Seth Roberts looked fixedly at Smith.

"You mean—the Chameleon?" stammered the driver.

"Yes—the Chameleon."

VIII.

WITH the wounded bandits tied fast and the dead buried, the stage continued on its

way, leaving the man and the girl standing face to face. Their horses were out of the running, yet they refused the lift offered by Seth Roberts, who would willingly have gone far out of his way to take them to the Winged-O.

"It's not so far to the ranch from here," the girl replied, with a smile toward her companion.

"Want to walk and stretch my legs," explained Smith. "We have to lead Calico in. He can limp along and at the same time carry my saddle and bridle. I want to go back and get my rifle anyhow."

Together they watched the coach lurch on its way and disappear over a divide to the south.

"Now will you tell me?" Bill Smith looked soberly down into the girl's brown eyes.

Her gaze lowered swiftly and her small boot traced a pattern in the dust. Still she did not answer.

"Don't you think you'd better tell me all about it?"

"It's not my story to tell," she murmured. "But I'll do everything I can to help you out. Perhaps I can help you—help you more than you think I can."

"Help me?"

"Yes. You want to capture the—the Chameleon, don't you?"

"There's only one thing in the world that I would rather do," he replied, as her glance lifted to his.

Brown eyes looked into blue, and once more her gaze fell earthward. Upon the girl's lips lingered a question—a question that would bring from him the words she wanted to hear.

She had read those words in his eyes, but she longed to hear him speak them. She wished he would tell her now.

"I'll tell you what that other thing is," he said with a hesitating intonation, "when—"

"When?"

"When we have captured the Chameleon."

Once more her eyes were raised to his, eyes that were serious, yet melting. They too told things that he longed to hear rather than see.

"You mustn't ask me questions," were the words she did utter. "Not until it is all over. Even then I shall have to get some one's permission before I can tell, for it is not my secret."

"I shall ask nothing," he promised.

"And I'll not ask you anything," she pledged in return—"not even what is your name, for I think you remember it now. You'll tell me then, won't you?"

"Now, if you ask."

"No"—this regretfully. "I promised that I wouldn't ask anything. We'll both wait."

Their wandering footsteps had brought them to the Winged-O before they realized it. Each secretly regretted that the way had not been longer; but, the homestead reached, each turned his attention to the practical tasks at hand.

The next morning he sought her out.

"We'd better be getting busy," was his impatient announcement. "I haven't much time to spare. I want to get those varmints rounded up right pronto."

"Not to-day; to-morrow, perhaps."

"But the beef round-up is coming in a few days. I can't do two things at once, and your father is set upon my taking charge. He thinks that some of that Double Bar-L crowd is liable to start something. He wants me on hand to soothe them if necessary."

"As you soothed those men who robbed the stage?"

"Well, something like that—if necessary."

Another day, and he waited still more impatiently. Betty Harrison took to her saddle early in the morning, and did not return until almost sundown. She found him on the bunk house steps, awaiting her coming.

"To-morrow," she told him. "I've done everything I could. You'll have to do the rest."

"What do you mean—I must do the rest?"

"I tried to get him to leave the country; but he swears that he is going to get you before he goes. There is nothing else to do. I'll go with you in the morning. Father has promised me that I can, if there is no other way out."

"How does it happen that you can ask him to leave—that your father knows about—" He checked himself, as the brown eyes looked accusingly into his. "Excuse me—I forgot. No questions from either until it is all over."

Dawn saw them take to their saddles, the man armed with revolvers and rifle, the same weapons with which he had battled so bravely at the stage holdup. Betty Harrison was carrying a light carbine, a weapon she sometimes used hunting coyotes on the upper mesa.

"You are not going to take that thing along," Smith declared. "You are a guide; I'll do all the shooting there is to be done."

"I'm going to take it," was her positive reply. "No telling—perhaps you may need it before we come back."

They had turned their horses down the short lane that led to the range, when a call caused both to rein in sharply. They turned in their saddles to see Scott Harrison running after them.

"Don't kill unless you have to, Bill," the rancher said, when he had reached them. "Mother is worried half to death, but I told her that if any one could handle the situation, you could. She realizes that something has to be done—done right away. She didn't want Betty to go along, but I told her that she was the only one who knew the trail. You know how Matilda feels and—"

He hesitated, looking at his daughter, as though to ask if he should say more.

"I told him that we would tell him all about it—after everything was over," was her reply to that questioning glance. "Bill says that he will handle the matter as gently as possible, but if he has to kill—"

"I won't unless I'm forced to," Smith broke in. "You see—I owe a little debt myself."

"I knew that you'd act that way." Scott Harrison extended a weathered hand in farewell. "Well, good luck, Bill. I can't wish you anything else."

Once more they started down the lane and soon were out on the range.

"This way," said the girl, after they had reached the outskirts of the bad lands.

Silently they rode, the miles slipping beneath the feet of their swiftly galloping horses. Mid-morning found them at the foot of the great butte, its sheer sides making it a fortress that would have been the joy of the predatory robber barons of old.

"They're up there." Betty Harrison pointed to the butte's flat top.

"How did they get there?" her companion demanded. "I've been around it a dozen times and didn't find a single break in the walls."

"I know the trail, but we'll have to leave our horses over there by the water hole, where you were the other day."

Afoot, they approached the great butte, Betty leading the way. They circled the base of the sheer cliffs, until the girl stepped into an opening that at first glance looked like a mere crevice in the towering granite walls.

"This is the only way to the top." She pointed to a narrow trail leading upward. "The man you want is up there—only one of the gang is with him—but they know you're coming."

Smith looked at her searchingly, but her frank gaze disarmed the flash of suspicion that came into his mind."

"You're taking a chance—an awful chance, Bill," the girl went on; "and—I'm going with you."

"You stay here," he commanded, almost roughly. "This is my game. It's no sport for a woman."

"I'm going—going to be there at the finish." She put her carbine in the crook of her arm and started to climb up the steep trail.

His arm reached out and pulled her back in spite of her resistance.

"You're not going!" This doggedly.

The brown eyes gazed coolly into the blue ones. It was a clash of wills. Then the girl's glance softened.

"All right," she surrendered. "I'll stay down here, but—"

Something akin to a sob broke into her voice, and the man was startled to see a teardrop forming in her eyes.

"Come on, Betty—let's go. I guess we can fight it out together, but you've got to

stay safely behind me; and when the shooting starts, you take to cover."

With that he led the way up the rocky trail.

IX.

A SHOT greeted them as they turned around a boulder to make the last steep ascent. They heard the crash of a bullet against the rocky side wall, and then its staccato ricochet as it glanced from one side to the other of the narrow defile.

"He's seen us." The girl's words came in a frightened whisper.

She had keyed herself up to this great adventure, but now that it was at hand fear assailed her—fear for herself, still greater fear for the man for whose sake she dared to enter what she knew would be a fight to the finish.

"Stoop low," Bill warned. "He knows this trail a lot better than we do."

Two shots rang out above them.

"They are both firing now," Smith muttered. "I don't think that you need have much fear as long as we are down here, but you'd better not come much farther."

"I'm going as far as you do," was the resolute reply. "That's Neil Hitson up there with him."

"Neil Hitson, from down in the Gila country?"

She nodded.

"Then you'd better look out until I settle his hash," he told her. "Neil would just as soon shoot a woman as anything else. In fact, he would rather, for he likes that kind of distinction. He has a lot of 'shot in the back' notches in his gun."

"I'm not afraid—not now." Betty had taken her place beside him upon a ledge of rock.

The brown eyes looked into the blue ones with melting tenderness. Their story was plain, the declaration of a woman who loves. His own glance returned their answer, giving silent tongue to a thought that was stronger than anything he had ever experienced before.

"I like you a heap, Betty," the man said, his eyes still holding hers.

"And I like you, Bill."

"And, Betty—"

"Yes, Bill."

"When we get out of this, when it's all over, I'm going to say something—"

Two more rifle shots crashed out from above, then a quick succession of revolver explosions.

"I guess I'd better wait until it's over," the man grinned. "Maybe I won't be here to say it, but I reckon you understand, Betty."

"Yes, Bill."

Once more they advanced, stooping low to gain the protection of the rocky side wall. The firing from above had ceased, and Bill Smith peered cautiously around a corner in an endeavor to locate his enemy.

A shot rang out as he jerked his head back, and again the sound of a bullet flattening itself against the rocks.

"Be careful, dear."

"Yes, Betty."

Once more she crawled forward so that she would be at his side. And now they advanced again, upward, still upward.

"I was an awful fool to let you come with me," the man growled in anger at himself. "The idea—"

"I don't want to kill you, Bill," a voice called from above them, "but I'm going to if you make me. I let you get by once, so our old debt is square; but it is you or me this time."

"All right, Charlie—you or me. I'm coming."

"Then you know—you know him!" Betty's exclamation was surprise filled.

Smith nodded in the affirmative, but avoided looking into the questioning brown eyes that he sensed were leveled upon him.

Once more they started upward, Betty staying close by his side despite his whispered warnings. Shots were coming from two guns above them, the fire crossing as the bandits took opposite sides of the narrow trail.

Now they were nearing the top. The side walls were shorting rapidly.

"You keep back now," Bill warned the girl. "I'm going to have to make a rush of it in a minute, and you're liable to get hurt. There's going to be some mighty fast shooting. I was crazy to let you come up with me—crazy, that's all."

"I'm glad you're crazy, Bill—and I'm going to stick."

And now the side walls were so low that they afforded little or no protection, even when stooping down.

"I'm going to rush them," Bill Smith whispered tensely. "Promise that you'll stay here until—"

"I promise only—"

Her face was close to his, and the brown eyes were melting in their tenderness. His arm drew her to him and their lips met to hold for a thrilling moment.

"Stay here, Betty dear, and I'll—"

His grasp released her, and she half raised herself to stay his onward rush.

"Don't, Bill, don't," she pleaded. "I just can't bear to have you—"

Her whispered supplication was broken by a shot.

A scream, and Betty Harrison fell limply to the rocky floor of the trail. Quickly Bill snatched her back and then cradled her in his arms. Down he carried her until the rocky walls assured them ample protection.

Betty was clutching her arm, the sleeve of which was already dyed crimson. And now a tiny stream coursed down her arm, as Smith placed her in a more comfortable position.

Quickly he stripped the colorful neckerchief from about his throat and deftly wound it above the spot from which the blood coursed. A few rapid twists and the flow was checked. Another, and it was stopped.

"Now I'll bandage it," he told her.

He ripped the sleeve from her arm, appraising the wound as he gently dressed it.

"Went clean through—no broken bones or other complications," he whispered encouragingly. "Guess I'll have to use my own sleeve as a bandage."

In another moment, the wound was neatly dressed and Betty was propped into a sitting posture.

"Will you give me my carbine?" she asked him. "I may need it, if anything happens to you."

"Nothing is going to happen to me," he stooped to kiss her once more. "I'm going up there and get those hounds."

"Oh, Bill—Bill," she clung closer.

"You stay here, dear, and I'll be back in a minute."

Before she could voice new protest, he had dashed up the narrow pathway. As his head appeared above the side walls, he saw Neil Hitson throw up his gun to shoot.

A puff of smoke from Bill Smith's hip and the bully of the Gila country spun around, clutching at his throat. A stagger and he slumped to the ground, falling into one of those impossible positions that only dead men can attain.

"Come on, Charlie," Bill Smith called to the man he had come to capture. "Your partner shot Betty Harrison—plugged her through the arm and he's answered for that. Now you—"

A shot that sent his gun rattling to the rock roof of the butte was the answer to the challenge.

"Come and get me," a voice taunted.

Snatching his other revolver from its holster, Bill Smith charged the bowlder from which the voice came. A gun point appeared, but a bullet from Smith's revolver knocked it from the hidden man's hands, as Bill's own weapon had been torn from his.

Around the bowlder dashed the foreman of the Winged-O, his foe retreating and loading a revolver as he ran.

"I don't want to kill you unless I have to, Charlie," Bill called, "but you are coming with me or stay here dead."

"Come and get me." The taunt was repeated.

A cartridge jammed in the weapon the bandit leader was trying to load and he threw the gun from him. Then he stooped suddenly to pick up the revolver that he had shot from Bill's hand but a moment ago.

Before his pursuer could check himself, the man fired twice. Smith's right arm dropped helplessly to his side as the first shot crashed into it. The second bullet seared his shoulder, and as his right arm fell, Bill's only weapon rattled upon the stones at his feet.

"And now!" the bandit chief faced Bill Smith with gun at full cock, "and now—old timer, I'm going to have a word or two

with you before I bump you off. I settled the debt, the debt I owed you for saving my life when I rode with the Rangers—so that's all square. I could have killed you that night in the stage, but I didn't want to. I simply put you out of action and then took you to a place where you were nursed back to strength.

"I know that you have been trailing me ever since that stage stickup. Dad Harrison, to whose home I took you, was a father to me, but he's turned against me since you came. Betty turned against me. Even Mother Harrison is against me—all because of you and you said you were my friend."

"I was until you turned crook," Bill Smith blurted out.

"You thought you were a slicker," the speaker waxed sarcastic, "playing that you had lost your mind—forgotten everything, but you didn't fool me. I put one over on you when I stuck up old Doc Stedman, got his instrument case and glasses and then trimmed my beard. I had you all guessing."

"You didn't fool me when you peddled that rumor about the Apaches and then painted your face," Bill answered, defiantly.

"It's a good thing that I've got the drop on you and your light is just about to go out—for keeps," the Chameleon continued. "The way things look to me, you're trying to get moony with little Betty. I'll stop that."

"Quit your talking and do your shooting," Bill Smith replied with warmth. "Betty and I are going to get married unless you shoot mighty straight. What's the matter—have you lost your nerve?"

"Just for that—just for that," the bandit's eyes were glinting-down the barrel of his leveled weapon, "just for that I'm going to—"

"Stick 'em up, Charlie," a girl's voice cut short his words.

He whirled to see Betty Harrison lying prone at the top of the narrow trail, her carbine beaded upon his head. And as he whirled, Bill Smith leaped forward.

A blow from his unwounded arm sent the bandit's weapon spinning across the smooth, rocky surface of the butte top. Awkwardly, Bill reached into his hip pocket

to drag forth a pair of steel manacles, which he held out.

"Put these on," he commanded.

The man turned to dash across the level surface of the butte.

"Shoot, Betty, shoot," Bill called.

No sound from the carbine.

"Shoot," he shouted again, "shoot him in the leg so that—"

"I can't, Bill, I can't," she sobbed.

The man snatched up the revolver that he had knocked from the Chameleon's hand. A glance told him that its hammer had snapped off when it was hurled upon the rocks. His wounded arm swung helplessly as he turned in pursuit of the fleeing outlaw.

"Come and get me," the man taunted once more, stopping suddenly.

He was poised, tip-toe upon the edge of that sheer and dizzy height. Six hundred feet below the escarpment of this natural fortress was the sandy plain from which sprang the towering butte.

Onward rushed Bill Smith intent only upon capturing his foe.

"Come and get me," again the mocking challenge rang out.

Smith stopped only in time to keep himself from toppling over the brink, but as he did, the man leaped headlong, his body curving like a diver's as it shot downward to be dashed to pieces on the rocks below.

Instinctively, Smith's uninjured arm flew up to shield his eyes from the sight. No need to peer over the side to see a shapeless mass below.

He turned to aid Betty down the rocky path that led to their horses.

"It's all over," he murmured, as he aided her to mount.

Then he painfully climbed into his own saddle and silently they rode homeward.

X.

"THERE'S really very little to tell," Betty Harrison spoke seriously a week later, as they strolled down the narrow lane that led to the open range. "Charlie Harrison was an adopted brother. Father and mother did everything they could for him. They

even paid back the men that Charlie robbed, but he would not reform. He ran away several years ago and joined the Rangers, but he deserted after a few months."

Both were wounded, their right and left arms in slings, but the hands of the uninjured members were clasped fondly.

"That's where I knew Charlie," explained Bill. "I managed to save his skin one night when he got into trouble and he remembered it. That's why he brought me here after he wounded me in the head. I guess he did not like the Rangers very much."

"Then you are a Ranger." The girl's eyes shone with a new admiration. "Perhaps you can tell me why they didn't send up a troop to round up those outlaws that Charlie had around him."

"They sent me, didn't they," the other countered with a grin. "There wasn't but one band of outlaws, was there?"

"No."

"That's the way the Rangers figure," Bill Smith had none of the violet in him when talking about his organization. "One band of varmints—one Ranger to soothe them. Same with riot—one riot, one Ranger."

"I see." Laughter was in her eyes.

"And now—" the man turned to their more intimate personal affairs, "have you broken the news to father and mother?"

She nodded, gravely, although the brown eyes retained their laughing lights.

"What did they say?"

"Well, mother said that she wished you'd come in and let her kiss you, but father—"

She hesitated tantalizingly.

"Well—what objection has he got?"

"He says he can't spare you for a bridegroom until after the beef round-up."

He stooped to kiss her lips.

"I guess that this is where Bill Smith sends in his papers and quits the Rangers for good," he said with stressed soberness.

"Then your name really is Bill Smith?"

"Sure—Bill Smith of the Rangers."

"Bill Smith," mused the girl, sounding the name as though to try it on her ear for the first time. "Bill Smith—how romantic!"



The Radio Planet

By **RALPH MILNE FARLEY**

Author of "The Radio Man," "The Radio Beasts," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

MYLES CABOT, a radio expert, who has married Princess Lilla, the queen of Cupia on the planet Venus, called by its inhabitants "Poros," returns to the earth for a visit. When Princess Lilla sends an S O S, Cabot starts back to Cupia by wireless. A thunderstorm throws him off his course; though he lands on Poros, he comes down on a different continent. After escaping from the toils of the Formians, a race of scientific ant-men who are old enemies of his, governed by a renegade Cupian, Prince Yuri, now absent, evidently making trouble in Cupia, Cabot manages to send his wife a message of cheer from a Formian wireless station—though he has no listening apparatus, as neither Formians nor Cupians have ears. Some furry savages rout him from the wireless station; these are the Roies. But a highly cultivated furry race of men, called Vairkings, capture him; they are still living in the age of wood and flint. Arkilu, the older daughter of their king, Theoph the Grim, takes a fancy to him. When Cabot explains that he has a wife in a distant land Arkilu thinks this is mere fantasy; she insists she is going to marry him as soon as they get to Vairkingia, the capital!

CHAPTER VII.

RADIO ONCE MORE.

SO Arkilu, the furry beauty, planned to marry Myles Cabot, the earth-man, the one who already loved and was wed to Lilla of Cupia! A happy prospect indeed! Yet he dared not repulse the Vairkingian

maiden, lest thereby he lose his chance of returning to his home and family.

For at last he had formulated a plan of action, namely to arm the hordes of Vairkingia, lead them against the ant-men, seize an ant-plane, and with it fly back to Cupia. So, for the present, he appeared to fall in with the matrimonial whim of the princess.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 26.

Early the next morning, however, as he was prowling around inside the tent, testing his weak legs, he overheard a conversation on the outside, which changed the situation considerably.

"But, father," remonstrated a voice which Myles recognized as that of Arkilu, "I found him, and therefore he is mine. I want him. He is beautiful!"

"Beautiful? Humph!" replied a stern male voice sarcastically. "He *must* be, without any fur! Oh, to think that my royal daughter would wish to wed a freak of nature, and a common soldier at that!"

"He's *not* a common soldier!" asserted the voice of Arkilu. "He wears clothes merely to preserve his health for my sake."

"Well, a sickly cripple then," answered her father's voice, "which is just as bad. At all events, Jud is the leader of this expedition, and therefore this captive belongs to him. You can have him only if Jud so wills. It is the law."

Myles Cabot stealthily crossed the tent and put his eye to an opening between the curtains at the tent opening. There stood the familiar figure of Arkilu, and confronting her was a massive male Vairking. His fur, however, was snow white, so that his general appearance resembled that of a polar bear. His face was appropriately harsh and cold. This was Theoph the Grim, ruler of the Vairkingi!

The dispute continued. And then there approached another man of the species. The newcomer, black-furred, was short, squat, and gnarled, yet possessed of unquestionable intelligence and a certain dignity which clearly indicated that he was of noble rank. He wore a leather helmet and carried a wooden lance.

Theoph the Grim hailed him with: "Ho, Jud, what brings you here?"

Jud raised his spear diagonally across his chest as a salute, and replied: "A change of plans, excellency. Upon reaching the river, I decided that it would be wiser not to return to Vairkingi by that route."

"Really meaning," interposed Arkilu, with a laugh, "that you found it impossible to throw a bridge across at that point."

"Why do you always doubt the reasons for my actions?" asked Jud.

"You wrong me," she replied, "I never doubt your reasons. Your *reasons* are always of the best. What I doubt is your *excuses*."

"Enough, enough!" shouted the king, "for I wish to discuss more immediate matters than nice distinctions of language. Jud's reasons or excuses, or whatever, are good enough for me. Jud, I wish to inform you that my daughter has recently captured a strange furless being, whom it is my pleasure to turn over to you. I have not yet seen this oddity—"

"Father, please!" begged Arkilu, but at this juncture, Myles, exasperated by the remarks of Theoph, parted the tent curtains and stepped out.

"Look well, oh, king!" he shouted. "Here stands Myles Cabot, the Minorian, beast from another world, freak of nature, sickly cripple, common soldier, and all that. Look well, oh, king!"

"A bit loud mouthed, I should say," remarked Theoph the Grim, not one whit abashed.

"Watch him crumple at the presence of a real man," added Jud the Excuse-Maker.

Suiting the action to the word, the latter stepped over to Myles and suddenly slapped him on the face.

As a boy, the earth-man had often seen larger boys point to their cheek or shoulder, with the words: "There is an electric button there. Touch it and something will fly out and hit you." But never had he essayed to press the magic button, for he could well imagine the result.

Such a result now occurred to Jud; for, the instant his fingers touched Cabot's cheek, out flew Cabot's clenched fist smack to the point of Jud's jaw, and tumbled him in the dust.

Jud picked himself up snarling, shook himself, and then rushed bull-like at the earth-man, who stood his ground, ducked the flying arms of his antagonist, and tackled him as in the old football days at college. Jud was thrown for a four-yard loss with much of the breath knocked out of his body.

Theoph the Grim, with a worried frown, and Arkilu the Beautiful, with an entranced smile, stood by and watched the contest.

The Vairking noble lay motionless on his back as Myles scrambled to his knees astride the other's body and placed his hands on the other's shoulders. But suddenly, the under-dog threw up his left leg, caught Myles on the right shoulder and pushed him backward. In an instant both men were on their feet, glaring at each other.

Then they clinched and went down again, this time with Jud on top. Theoph's look changed to a smile, and Arkilu became worried. But, before Jud had time to follow up his advantage, Cabot secured a hammer-lock around his neck and shoulders, and then slowly forced him to one side until their positions were reversed, and the shoulders and hips of the furry one were squarely touching the ground.

In a wrestling match, that would have constituted a victory for Myles Cabot, but this was a fight and not a mere wrestling match; so the earth-man secured a hammer-lock again and turned Jud the Excuse-Maker over until he lay prone, whereupon the victor rubbed the nose of the vanquished back and forth in the dirt, until he heard a muffled sound which he took to be the Vairkingian equivalent of the "'nuff" so familiar to every pugnacious American school-boy.

His honor satisfied, Cabot arose, brushed himself off, and bowed to the two spectators. Jud sheepishly got to his feet as well, all the fight knocked out of him. Theoph stared at the victor with displeasure and at his own countryman with disgust, but Arkilu rushed over to Cabot with a little cry, flung her arms around him, and drew him within the tent.

As they passed through the curtains, Myles heard Jud explaining to the king: "I decided to let him beat me, so that thereby I might give pleasure to her whom I love."

It was a typical remark for Jud the Excuse-Maker.

Inside the tent, Arkilu bathed the scratches and bruises of the earth-man and hovered around him and fussed over him as though he had accomplished something much more wonderful than merely to have come out on top in a schoolboy rough-and-tumble fight.

Myles was very sorry that it all had happened. In the first place, he had lost his temper, which was to his discredit. In the second place, he had made a hero of himself in the eyes of the lady whose love he was most anxious to avoid. And in the third place, he had fought the man who was best calculated to protect him from that undesired love. Altogether, he had made a mess of things, and all he could do about it was meekly to submit to the ministrations of the furry princess. What a life!

Finally, Arkilu departed, leaving Cabot alone with recriminations for his rashness, longings for his own Princess Lilla, and worries for her safety.

The next day the expedition took up its delayed start homeward, Jud having found a route which required no alibis. The tents were struck, and were piled, with the other impedimenta, on two-wheeled carts, which the common soldiers pulled with long ropes.

In spite of Arkilu's pleadings, Myles was assigned to one of these gangs, Theoph grimly remarking: "If the hairless one is well enough to vanquish Jud, he is well enough to do his share of the work."

Jud himself explained to Arkilu that the real reason why he had suggested this was that he sincerely believed that the exercise would be good for Cabot's health.

During one of the halts, when Jud happened to be near Cabot's gang, the earth-man strode over to the commander, who instinctively cringed at his approach.

"I'm not fighting to-day," Myles assured the Vairking with an engaging smile, "but may I have a word with you?"

So the two withdrew a short distance out of earshot of the rest, and Myles continued: "I do not love Arkilu the Beautiful. You do. Let us understand one another, and help one another. You assist me to keep away from the princess, and I shall assist you by keeping away from the princess. Later I shall make further suggestions as to how we can coöperate to mutual advantage. I have spoken."

Jud stared at him with perplexed admiration.

"Who are you," he asked, "who stands unabashed in the presence of kings and nobles, who addresses a superior without

permission, and yet without offensive familiarity?"

"I am Cabot the Minorian," the other replied, "ruler over Cupia, a nation larger and more powerful than yours. A race of fearsome beasts have landed on the western shores of your continent. They are enemies of mine, and will become enemies of yours as they extend their civilization and run counter to yours."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Jud, "for how could these mythical creatures cross the boiling seas to land on our shores?"

"By magic," answered Myles, "magic which they stole from me. And they held me prisoner until I overthrew their magic and escaped, to be found by your expedition."

"Then you are a magician?"

"Yes."

"Ah, that explains how you defeated me in combat yesterday," asserted Jud with a relieved sigh.

"We will let it go at that," admitted Myles, smiling. "But to continue, let me frankly warn you that unless you destroy these Formians, they will eventually destroy you."

"They now possess magic against which you Vairkings would be powerless; magic methods of soundless speech; magic devices for transmitting that speech as far as from here to Vairking; magic wagons which can travel through the air and at such a speed that they could go from here to Vairkingi and back in a twelfth part of a day; and magic bows which shoot death-dealing pellets faster than the speed of sound, and which can outrange your bows and arrows ten to one."

"But if you will give me a workroom and materials—and keep Arkilu away from me—I can devise magic which will overcome *their* magic, and which will make Vairkingi the unquestioned master of this whole continent, despite the Roies and the Formians. Then I shall seize one of the Formian magic wagons, fly back in it to my own country, and leave you in peaceful dominion over this continent. What do you say?"

"I say," replied the Vairking, "that you are an amusing fellow, and an able spinner of yarns. But you talk with evident ear-

nestness and sincerity. Wherefore, I shall give you your workshop and your materials; but on one condition, namely, that you entertain me and my friends with your stories. And mayhap your magic may entertain us likewise. I have spoken."

And thus it came to pass that Jud the Excuse-Maker attached the earth-man to his personal retinue, and placed a laboratory at his disposal upon the return arrival of the expedition at Vairkingi.

This city is, or was at that time, built entirely of wood. It was surrounded by a high stockade, and was divided by stockades into sections, each presided over by a noble, save only the central section which housed the retinue of Theoph himself. Within the sections, each family had its own walled-off enclosure. All streets and alleys passed between high wooden walls. The buildings and fences were elaborately carved and gaudily colored.

As the returning expedition approached the great wall, they were met by blasts of trumpet music from the parapets. Then a huge gate opened, and they passed inside. Here they quickly separated, and each detachment hastened to the quarter of the nobleman from whom they had been drawn. Jud and his detachment proceeded down many a high-walled street until they came to a gate bearing the insignia of Jud himself.

Inside were more streets of the same character through which Jud's retinue dispersed to the gates of their own little inclosures until Jud and Myles Cabot were left alone.

The noble led his new acquisition to a gate.

"This inclosure is vacant," explained Jud. "It will be yours. Enter and take possession. Within, you will find a small house and a shop. Serving maids will be sent from my own household to make you comfortable. Repair to my palace to-night and tell me some more stories. Meanwhile good-by for the present."

And he strode off and disappeared around a bend in the street.

Cabot passed in through the gate.

He found a well, from which he drew water to fill a carefully fashioned wooden

pool. Scarce had he finished bathing, when a group of furry girls arrived from the house of his patron bearing brooms and blankets and food.

One of them also bore a note which read as follows:

If you love me you will find a way to reach me.
ARKILU.

"And if not, what?" said he to himself.

After he had rested and dined, and the place had been made thoroughly neat, all the girls withdrew save the one who had brought the note. She informed him that her name was "Quivven" and that she had been ordered to remain in the inclosure as his servant.

She was small and lithe. Her hair was a brilliant yellow-gold, and her eyes were blue. If it had not been for her fur, she would have passed for a twin to his own Lilla. This fact brought an intense pang to him and caused such a wave of homesickness that he sat down on a couch and hid his face in his hands.

But the pretty creature made no attempt to comfort him. Instead, she merely remarked to herself: "I wonder what Arkilu can possibly see in him. Even Att the Terrible is much more handsome."

Finally, Myles arose with more determination and courage than he had felt at any time since his return to Poros.

Guided by Quivven, he set out for Jud's dwelling, firmly resolved to take steps that very night, which should result eventually in his reaching Cupia, and rescuing his family from the renegade Yuri.

Jud's palace was elaborate and barbaric. Jud himself was seated on a divan surrounded by Vairkingian beauties. They all were frankly inquisitive to see this hairless creature from another world, yet rather turned up their pretty noses at him when they found him dressed like a common soldier.

Cabot regaled the gathering with an account of his first arrival on Poros and of the two wars of liberation which had freed Cupia from the domination of the ants. All the while he was most eager to get down to business with the noble; yet he realized that he had been employed for a definite

purpose, namely, story-telling, and that his first duty was to please his patron.

Finally, the ladies withdrew, and Myles Cabot, the radio man, began the first discussion of radio that he had undertaken since his return to Poros.

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT WHY RADIO?

THREE fields of "magic" were open to him: rifle-fire, aviation, and radio.

The opportunity for building a workable airplane among people who knew no metal arts was obviously slight. To make a radio set should be possible, if he could but find certain minerals and other natural products, which ought to be available in almost any country. But easiest of all would be to extract iron from the ore which he had observed in his journey across the mountains, forge rifle barrels and simple breech mechanisms, and make gunpowder and bullets.

Therefore it is plain why he did not attempt to build airships, but it is hard to see why he did not make firearms rather than a radio set. Firearms would have enabled him to equip the Vairkings for battle against the Formians, whereas radio could serve no useful purpose at the moment.

Yet, he took up radio first. I think the explanation lies in two facts: first, he wanted above all to get in touch with his home in Cupia, find out the status of affairs there, and give courage to his wife and his supporters, if any of them remained; and secondly, he was primarily a radio engineer, and so his thoughts naturally turned to radio and minimized its difficulties. There would be plenty of time to arm the Vairkings after he found out how affairs stood at home.

So he broached to Jud his project of constructing a radio set which would necessitate extended journeys in search of materials. But the Vairking noble was singularly uninterested.

"I know that you can spin interesting yarns," said he, "but I do not know whether you can do magic. Why, then,

should I deprive myself of the pleasure of listening to your stories, just for the sake of letting you amuse yourself in a probably impossible pursuit? First, you must convince me that you are a magician; then perhaps I may consent to your attempting further magic."

"Very well," replied the earth-man. "To-morrow evening I shall display to you some of the more simple examples of my art. Meanwhile, I shall spend my time concocting mystic spells in preparation for the occasion."

Then he bowed and withdrew, thanking his lucky stars that he had learned a few tricks of sleight of hand while at college.

Myles now recalled several of these, and devoted most of the succeeding day to preparing a few simple bits of apparatus. Then he practiced his tricks before the golden-furred Quivven, to her complete mystification.

That evening, he went again to the quarters of Jud the Excuse-Maker. The same group was there as on the evening before, and in addition, several other Vairking men and their wives.

After an introduction by his host, the earth-man started in. First he did, in rapid succession, some simple variations of sleight of hand.

He had wanted to perform the well-known "restoration of the cut handkerchief," but unfortunately the Vairkings possessed neither handkerchiefs nor scissors, and he was forced to improvise a variant. Taking a piece of stick, which he had brought with him for a wand, he stuffed a small part of one of the gaudy hangings through his closed left fist between the thumb and forefinger, so that it projected in a gathered-up point about two inches beyond his hand. Then pulling the curtain over toward one of the stone open-wick lamps which illuminated the chamber, he completely burned off the projecting bit of cloth.

Evidently this was one of Jud's choicest tapestries, for the noble emitted a howl of grief and rage, and leaped from his divan, scattering the reclining beauties in both directions. If he had interfered in time to prevent the burning, it would have spoiled

the trick, but as it was, the confusion caused by his onrush played right into Cabot's hands.

Myles stepped back in apparent terror as Jud seized his precious curtain and hunted for the scorched hole. But there was no hole there; the curtain was intact.

Jud looked up sheepishly into the triumphant face of his protégé, who thereupon stated: "You did not need to worry about your property in the hands of a true magician."

"Oh, I was not afraid," explained Jud the Excuse-Maker. "I merely pretended fear, so as to try and confuse your magic."

"Please do not do it again," admonished the other sternly.

The Vairking noble returned to his seat. His guests were enthralled.

This was a fitting climax for the evening. The amateur conjurer bowed low and withdrew.

Quivven was waiting up for him at his house, and reported that some one had torn a small piece out of one of the tapestries. Several days later she found the piece, but alas, there was a hole burnt in the middle of it.

The next morning Jud the Excuse-Maker called at the quarters of Cabot, the furless. It was a rare honor, so Cabot answered the door in person. Jud expressed his conviction that the earth-man really was a magician, after all, and that therefore he—Jud—was agreeable to an expedition to the mountains in search of rocks whose mystical properties would enable the performing of even greater magic. It was soon arranged that Cabot, with a bodyguard of some twenty Vairking soldiers and a low-ranking officer, should start on the morrow.

Myles was thrilled. Now he was getting somewhere at last! The rest of the day he devoted to preparing a list of the materials for which he must hunt.

To make a radio-telephone sending and receiving set, he would need dielectrics, copper wire, batteries, tubes, and iron. For dielectrics, wood and mica would suffice. Wood was common, and the Vairkings were skilled carpenters and carvers. For fine insulation, mica would be ideal; and this mineral ought to be procurable

somewhere in the mountains, whose general nature he had observed to be granite.

To make copper wire, he would need copper ore—preferably pyrites—quartz, limestone, and fuel. The necessary furnaces he would build of brick; any one can bake clay into bricks.

For cement, Myles finally hit upon using a baked and ground mixture of limestone and clay, both of which ingredients he would have at hand for other purposes.

The Vairkings' used wood charcoal in their open fires, and this would do nicely for his fuel.

For the wire-drawing dies he would use steel. This disposed of the copper question, and brought him to a consideration of iron, which he would need at various places in his apparatus. This metal could be smelted from the slag of the copper furnaces, using an appropriate flux such as fluorspar.

Cabot next turned his attention to his power source. For some time he debated the question of whether or not to build a dynamo. But how about the storage batteries? He wasn't quite sure how to find or make the necessary red and yellow lead salts for packing the plates.

Thus by the time that Cabot reached the contemplation of having either to find or make his lead compounds he decided to turn his attention to primary cells. The jars could be made of pottery, or from the glass which was going to be necessary for his tubes anyhow. Wood charcoal would furnish the carbon elements. Zinc could easily be distilled from zincspar, if that particular form of ore were found. Sal ammonia solution could be made from the ammonia of animal refuse, common salt, and sulphuric acid.

Mass production of zinc carbon batteries should thus be an easy matter, and they would serve perfectly satisfactorily, as neither compactness nor portability was a requisite. The radio man accordingly abandoned the idea of dynamos and accumulators in favor of large quantities of wet cells.

The tubes, it appeared to Myles, would present the greatest problem. Platinum for the filaments, grids, and plates had been

fairly common in nugget form in Cupia, and so presumably could be found in Vairkingia. Glass, of course, would be easy to make.

Alcohol for laboratory burners could be distilled from decayed fruit.

But the chief stumbling block was how to exhaust the air from his tubes, and how to secure magnesium to use in completing the vacuum. These matters he would have to leave to the future in the hope of a chance idea. For the present there were enough elements to be collected so that he would be kept busy for a great many days. Accordingly he copied off the following two lists:

Materials readily available:

Wood	Common salt
Wood ashes	White sand
Charcoal	Animal refuse
Clay	Decayed fruit

Materials to hunt for:

Mica	Galena
Copper ore	Zinc ore
Quartz	Platinum
Limestone	Chalk
Fluorspar	Magnesium

But that afternoon all his plans were disrupted by a message reading:

TO THE FURLESS ONE:

You are directed to appear for my amusement at my palace to-morrow night. Fail not.
THEOPH. THE GRIM.

"That puts an end to my trip," said he to Quivven. "How do you suppose his majesty got wind of the fact that I am a conjuror?"

"One of the guests at the show last night must have told him," she replied.

But something in her tone of voice caused Myles to look at her intently, and something in her expression caused him to say:

"You know more than you tell. Out with it!"

Whereat Quivven shrugged her pretty golden shoulders, and said:

"Why deceive you? Though you are so stupid that it is very easy. Who brought you the note from Arkilu the night of your arrival here?"

"You did," answered Cabot. "Why didn't I put two and two together before? Then you are connected in some way with Arkilu?"

She laughed contemptuously.

"How did you guess it?" she taunted. "Yes, one would rather say I *am* connected in some way with Arkilu; for I am her sister, set here to spy on you by connivance with the chief woman of Jud's servants, who is an old nurse of ours. I am Quivven the Golden Flame, daughter of Theoph the Grim, and it is from me that he learned of your mystic abilities. What do you think of that, beast?"

"I think," said Myles noncommittally, "that although you truly are a golden flame, you ought to have been named 'Quivven the Pepper Pot.'"

Thereat she suddenly burst into tears and rushed out of the room.

"Funny girl," commented Myles to himself, as he laid aside the lists prepared for his prospecting trip, and set about the concoction of some stage properties for his forthcoming appearance.

It was a sulky Quivven who served his meal that evening, so much so that Cabot playfully accused her of putting poison in his stew. This did not render her any more gracious, however.

"If I did not love my sister very much," she asserted, "I would not stand for you for one moment."

The rest of the meal was eaten in silence during which Cabot had an idea.

So when the food had been cleared away he asked the aureate maiden:

"Can you smuggle a note to your sister for me?"

"Yes," she assented gloomily, "and I shall tell her how you are treating me."

At which he could not refrain from remarking:

"Do you know, Quivven, I believe that you are falling in love with me."

"You beast!" she cried at him. "Oh, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!"

And she turned her face to the wall and pounded on the tapestries with her little golden furry paws.

"Come, come!" said Cabot soothingly. "I don't mean to tease you, and we must

both think of your sister. The note. How long will it take you to deliver it and return?"

"Shall I hurry?" she asked unguardedly.

"Yes."

"Then it will take me less than one-twelfth of a day."

That would be quite sufficient for his plans. Accordingly he wrote:

ARKILU THE BEAUTIFUL:

Send word how I can see you after the performance. But beware of Jud.

CABOT THE MINORIAN.

This note he folded up, placed it in one little palm of Quivven, and closed her golden fingers over it.

Whereat she sprang back with, "Don't you dare touch me like that!" and rushed out of the house, sobbing angrily.

Really, he must be more careful with this delicate creature; for although her intense hatred furnished him considerable amusement, yet it was possible to go too far. He must at least be polite to the sister of his benefactress.

But there was no time to be given over to worrying about Quivven's sensitive feelings; for the note had been sent merely to give him a slight respite from her prying eyes, in order that he might sneak out for a conference with Jud; of course he had no intention of any secret tryst with Arkilu. Heaven forbid, when he loved his own distant Lilla so intensely!

So he hurried to the quarters of the Vairkingian noble, who received him gladly, being most interested in learning whether there was any rational explanation to be given to the various magic tricks of the evening before. But Myles blocked his inquisitiveness by the flat assertion that all were due to mystic spells and talismans alone, and then got rapidly down to business, for there was no time to be lost.

So Myles told of the note from Theoph the Grim requiring his presence at the royal palace, and how he suspected that Princess Arkilu was responsible. Also, he related his discovery that his maidservant was Quivven, the Golden Flame; but he had the decency to refrain from implicating the head of Jud's ménage.

"I shall have her removed at once," asserted the Vaiking.

"No, no," hastily interposed Myles, "that would never do: for now that we know she is a spy it will be easy to outwit her. But a new one we never could be sure of."

Then he told how he had got rid of Quivven for the evening by sending her with the note to Arkilu. Jud's brow darkened at the mention of the note, and even more so at its contents.

"But," said Myles, "that note will serve a three-fold purpose; first, it has enabled me undetected to pay this visit to you; secondly, it will allay Arkilu's suspicions; and thirdly, it will stir you to block my appearance before Theoph to-morrow."

"Oh, I would have done that anyhow," insisted Jud. "My plans are all made. I shall send a runner to Theoph, and warn him to search Arkilu's rooms for your note. When he finds the note he will certainly cancel the arrangements for your performance. Thus will the note serve a *fourth* purpose."

"So it will," admitted Myles admiringly. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Return now to your quarters, and I will send you word of the outcome."

"I wouldn't if I were you," admonished Myles. "For a message from you would reveal to our fair young spy the fact of my secret interview with you this evening. Let Theoph himself send the word."

"So be it. You may count on starting on your expedition to-morrow as planned. Good luck to you."

"Good luck to *you*, Jud the Great, and may you win Arkilu the Beautiful."

So the earth-man hastened back to his quarters, where Quivven, on her return, found him placidly reclining on a divan.

"You were gone a long time," he greeted her, whereat she smiled graciously for the first time that day.

"I hope that you have managed to keep busy and amused during my absence," said she.

"Yes," he replied, "I have been preparing for to-morrow's work."

That wasn't such a lie as it might have been.

For a few minutes they chatted playfully together, and then she suddenly narrowed her eyelids, looked at him with a peculiar expression, and asked: "Aren't you the least bit anxious to know what answer your Arkilu made to your note?"

That was so; he *had* written Arkilu a note; but now that it had served its purpose he had completely forgotten about it. How could he square himself with little Quivven? By flattery?

"Of course I'm anxious to know," he asserted, "but I was so glad to have come back again that for the moment I neglected to ask you."

Quivven the Golden Flame pouted.

"Now you're teasing me again," said she, "and I won't stand for it."

"But I really want to know," he continued with mock eagerness. "Please do tell me about your sister."

"I gave her the note—"

Just then there came a loud pounding on the gate outside; so loud, in fact, that the sound penetrated within the house. Quivven stopped talking. She and Myles listened intently. The pounding continued.

"Evidently we are to have company this evening," remarked he, glad to change the subject.

Quivven replied, "Such a racket at this time of night can mean naught but ill. Let us approach the gate with care, and question the intruders."

So saying she took down one of the hanging stone lamps and opened the outside door. It was a typical dark, silent, fragrant Porovian evening, except for the fact that the darkness was broken by the glare of torches beyond the wall, and that the silence was broken by the pounding on the gate, and that the fragrance was marred by smoke of Quivven's lamp.

"Who is there?" called Quivven.

To this there came back the peremptory shout: "Open quickly, in the name of Theoph the Grim!"

The golden girl recoiled. Even Cabot himself shuddered as he realized the apparent cause of the disturbance; his plot with Jud had produced results beyond what they had planned; and Theoph, upon seizing the note, had decided not merely to cancel

the sleight of hand performance, but also to place his daughter's supposed sweetheart under arrest.

"I am afraid that your father has intercepted my letter to your sister," explained Cabot.

Quivven clutched his arm with one furry little paw.

"Hide," she whispered hurriedly, "while I tell them that you are at Jud's. They will then at least dispatch a detachment to test the truth of this. Meanwhile I will engage the rest in conversation so that you can make your escape by the rear passage, of which they may be unaware. To stay will mean death."

"You can't do that," he replied, passing a protecting arm around her slim, furry shoulders. "It won't never do to have it become known that Quivven the Golden Flame, daughter of Theoph the Grim, was working disguised as a maidservant. No, it would never do!"

The pounding increased, and again came the shout, "Open quickly, in the name of Theoph the Grim! Open quickly, or we break in the door!"

The little golden Vairking princess stiffened.

"No," she flatly asserted, "your life is the more important."

Cabot thought quickly.

"Then for my own sake let me surrender myself," he pleaded. "For even though I escape for the present they will eventually find me; and think how it will increase the wrath of your father to learn that I know two of his daughters instead of merely one. I'll tell you what! You leave by the rear door, make your way quickly to Arkilu, and see if the two of you can intercede for me with your stern parent."

So saying, he released her. The slim princess handed him the light, and sped into the interior of the house.

"Cease your noise!" he shouted. "For I, Myles Cabot the Minorian, come to unbar the gate in person!"

He strode down the path. Quickly he slid the huge wooden bolts, swung the gate open, and stepped outside, shielding the lamp with one hand to get a view of the disturbers. But his lamp was instantly

dashed from him and his arms bound behind him in a twinkling.

His captors were about a dozen Vairking soldiers in leather tunics and helmets, some carrying wooden spears and some holding torches, while their evident leader was similarly clothed but armed with a sharp wooden rapier.

As soon as the prisoner was securely bound the guard hustled him roughly off down the street, whither he knew not.

Thus were his plans rudely dashed to the ground. On the preceding night all had been arranged for his trip to secure the elements for the construction of a radio set with which to communicate with Cupia and his Lilla. That morning he had been forced to postpone his trip, in order to perform before Theoph the Grim. And this evening he was Theoph's prisoner, slated for—what?

CHAPTER IX.

A PRISONER.

THE squad of Vairking soldiers, with Myles Cabot as their prisoner, had traversed nowhere near the distance to the palace, when they turned from the street through a gate.

"Where are they going to take me now?" thought Myles.

This question was soon answered, for the party entered a building which was evidently a dwelling of the better class. The hall was well lighted, so that Myles blinked at the sudden glare.

The leader of the party placed himself squarely in front of his prisoner, with hands on his hips, and remarked with apparent irrelevance: "Well, we fooled Quivven, didn't we?"

The prisoner stared at him in surprise. It was Jud! Jud, disguised as a common soldier.

Cabot laughed with relief.

"You certainly gave me a bad hundred-and forty-fourth part of a day," he asserted. "I didn't recognize you in your street clothes. What is the great idea?"

"The great idea," the noble replied, "to quote your phrase, is that we did truly rep-

resent Theoph the Grim. He authorized me to arrest you in his name. The pretty little spy will report your capture to Arkilu, and her father will stonily refuse to reveal where you are imprisoned.

"Meanwhile I shall give the golden one time to escape, and shall then send a second squad to seize your effects. Your expedition will start immediately. Come, unbind the prisoner."

As soon as his bonds were loosed Myles warmly grasped the hand of his benefactor.

"You are all right!" he exclaimed. "You have completely succeeded without leaving anything to explain."

"I *always* succeed!" replied Jud a bit coldly.

So it came to pass that, late that night, Cabot, the radio man, dressed in leather tunic and helmet, and armed with a tempered wooden rapier, set out with his bodyguard for the western mountains. In silence, and with the minimum of lights, they threaded the streets of Jud's compound and then the streets of the city until they came to the west gate, where a pass signed by Theoph the Grim gave them free exit. Thence they moved due westward across the plain, with scouts thrown out to guard against contact with any roving Roies.

By daybreak they had reached the cover of the wooded foothills, and there they camped for twenty-four hours of much needed rest. Finally, on the second morning following their stealthy departure from Vairkingi their journey really started.

The commander of the bodyguard was an intelligent youth named Crota. During the meals at the first encampment Myles described to Crota in considerable detail the particular form of copper pyrites which furnishes the bulk of the copper used for electrical purposes on the continent of Cupia.

After listening intently to this description for about the fifth time Crota smiled and said:

"We Vairkings place no stock in pretty stones, save as playthings for our children, but I do recall the little golden cubes with which the children of one of the hill villages are wont to play tum-tum. This

village, Sur by name, is only a day's journey to the southward. Let us turn our steps thither and learn from the children where they get their toys."

"'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,'" quoted the earth-man to himself.

And so they set out to the southward, following a trail which wound in and out between the fertile silver-green hills, which were for the most part but scantily wooded.

Toward the close of the day Crota's scouts established contact with the outposts of the village which they were seeking, and after an exchange of communications by runner the expedition was given free passage to proceed. Shortly thereafter they came in sight of the village itself.

From among the surrounding verdant rolling terrain there arose one rocky eminence with precipitous sides, and with a flat summit on which stood the village of Sur surrounded by a strong wooden palisade.

Up the face of the cliff there ran a narrow zigzag path, cut in the living rock, and overhung by many a bastion from which huge stones could be tumbled or molten pitch poured on any invaders so temerarious as to attempt the ascent.

Along this path the expedition crawled in single file with many pauses to draw their breath; and before they reached the summit Cabot realized full well how it was that Sur, the southernmost outpost of Vairkingian civilization, had so long and so successfully withstood the onslaughts of the wild and savage Roies.

The inhabitants, furry Vairkings, turned out in large numbers to greet the visitors and especially to inspect the furless body and the much overfurred chin of the earth-man. Guides led the expedition to a large public hall where, after a speech of welcome by the headman of the village, they were fed and quartered for the night.

Between the meal and bedtime the visiting soldiers strolled out to see the sights by the pale pink light of the unseen setting sun. Cabot and Crota together walked to the west wall to observe the sunset.

As Crota and Cabot leaned on the parapet a rattling noise on the rocky walk beside them disturbed their reverie. Looking

down, they saw three furry children rolling some small objects along the ground. With a slight exclamation of surprise and pleasure, the Vairking soldier swooped down upon the youngsters, scooped up one of the toys, and handed it to the earth-man.

"Tum-tum," announced Crota laconically, and sure enough it was one of the small game-cubes, which he had described to his companion.

But before the latter had had the slightest opportunity to examine it the despoiled infant let out a howl of childish rage, and commenced to assail Myles with fists and teeth and feet.

"Stop that!" shouted Crota, grabbing him by one arm and pulling him away. "We don't want to keep your tum-tum; we merely want to look at it. This gentleman has never seen a tum-tum."

"Gentleman?" replied the boy from a safe distance. "Common soldier! Bah!"

But Myles Cabot was too engrossed to notice the insult. The small cube in his hand was undoubtedly a metallic crystal, but whether chalcopyrite or not he could not tell in the fading light. In fact, it might be the sunset which gave the stone its coppery tinge.

Taking a small flint knife from a leather sheath that hung from his belt, Myles offered it to the child in exchange for the toy, in spite of Crota's gasping protest at the extravagance.

The boy eagerly accepted the offer, remarking: "Thank you, sir. You should take off those clothes."

It was a very neat and subtle compliment. Cabot was impressed.

"Your name, my son?" he asked, patting the furry little creature on the head.

"Tomo the Brief," was the reply.

"I shall remember it."

Then he hurried back to the public hall, eager to examine his purchase by the light of the oil flares.

Sure enough, it turned out to be really pyrites, and by its deep color probably a pyrites rich in copper. To Myles Cabot, the radio man, it meant the first tangible step toward the accomplishment of the greatest radio feat ever undertaken on two worlds: namely, the construction of a com-

plete sending and receiving set out of nothing but basic materials in their natural state without the aid of a single previously fabricated man-made tool, utensil, or chemical. To this day Myles wears this cube as a pendent charm in commemoration of that momentous occasion.

As he lay on the floor of the public building that night the earth-man reviewed the events of the day until he came to the episode of the purchase of the cubical pyrite crystal from little Tomo.

"Your name, my son," Cabot had asked him.

"My son," thought Cabot. "I have a son of my own across the boiling seas on the continent of Cupia, and a wife, the most beautiful and sweetest lady on Poros. They are in dire danger, or were many months ago when I received the S O S which led me to return through the skies to this planet. Oh, how I wish that I could learn what that danger was, and what has happened to them since then."

Thus he mused; and yet when he came to figure up the time since his capture he was able to account for less than three weeks of earth time. Perhaps there was yet a chance of rescue, if he would but hurry.

The danger which had inspired his Lilla's call for help was undoubtedly due to the return of Prince Yuri across the boiling seas. For all that Myles knew, Princess Lilla and the loyal Cupians were still holding out against their renegade prince.

The message which Cabot had ticked out into the ether from the radio station of the ants had been sent only a few days after the S O S. If received by Lilla or any of her friends, it had undoubtedly served to encourage them and stiffen their resistance to the usurper; and if received by Yuri it had undoubtedly thrown into him the fear of the Great Builder.

Musing and hoping thus, the earth-man fell into a troubled sleep, through which there swirled a tangled phantasmagoria of ant-men, Cupians, whistling bees, and Vairkings, with occasional glimpses of a little blue-eyed blond head, sometimes surmounted by golden curls and two dainty antennae, and sometimes completely covered with golden fur.

Shortly after sunrise he awoke, and aroused Crota. No time must be lost! The Princess Lilla must be saved!

But there was nothing they could do until their hosts brought the food for the morning meal. From the bearers they then ascertained that the tum-tum cubes were gathered in a cleft in the rocks only a short distance from the village; and that, although the perfect cubes were rare and quite highly prized, the imperfect specimens were present in great quantities. In fact, hundreds of cartloads had been mined and picked over in search of perfect cubes, and thus all this ore would be available in return for the mere trouble of shoveling it into carts.

As soon as arrangements could be made with the headman of Sur, Cabot and his party, accompanied by guides, crept down the narrow zigzag path to the plain below the village, and proceeded up a ravine to the quarry, where they verified all that had been told them.

It was a beautiful sight; a rocky wall out of a cleft in which there seemed to pour a waterfall of gold.

But on close inspection, every cube was seen to be nicked or bent or out of proportion, or jammed part way through or into some other cube.

The soldiers, both those from Vairkingi and those from Sur, scrambled up the golden cascade and started hacking the crystals out of the solid formation, in search for perfect cubes, while their two leaders watched them with amusement from below.

Then all at once there came a shriek, and one of the Vairkings toppled the whole length of the pile, almost to Cabot's feet, where he lay perfectly still, the wooden shaft of an arrow projecting from one eyeball.

"Roies!" shouted Crota, and instantly every member of the party took cover with military precision behind some rock or tree.

They had not long to wait, for a shower of missiles from up the valley soon apprised them of the location of the enemy. So the Vairkings thereafter remained alert. Those who had bows drew them and discharged a flint-tipped arrow at every stir of grass or

bush in the locality whence the missiles of the enemy had come.

"We know not their number," whispered Crota to Cabot. "And since we have accomplished our mission let us return to Sur as speedily as possible."

"Agreed," replied the earth-man.

The withdrawal was accomplished as follows. Crota first dispatched runners to the village to inform the inhabitants of the situation. Then, leaving a small rear guard of archers and slingers to cover their retreat, he formed the remainder of the expedition in open order, and set out for Sur as rapidly as the cover would permit.

The enemy kept pretty well hidden, but it was evident from the increase of arrows and pebbles that their numbers were steadily augmenting. Noting this, Crota sent another runner ahead with this information.

It now became necessary to replenish and relieve the rear guard, of which several were dead, several more wounded, and the rest tired and out of ammunition. This done, Crota ordered the main body of his force to leave cover and take up the double quick.

The result was unexpected. A hundred or more Roies charged yelling down the ravine through the Vairking rear guard, and straight at Cabot's men, who at once ran to cover again and took deadly toll of the oncoming enemy.

But the Roies so greatly outnumbered the Vairkings that the tide could not be stemmed, and soon the two groups were mingled together in a seething mass. The first rush was met, spear on spear. Then the sharp wooden swords were drawn, and Cabot found himself lunging and parrying against three naked furry warriors.

The neck was the vulnerable spot of the Vairkings, and it was this point which the Roies strove to reach, as Cabot soon noted. That simplified matters, for guarding one's neck against such crude swordsmen as these furry aborigines was easy for a skilled fencer such as he. Accordingly, one by one, he ran his three antagonists through the body.

Just as he was withdrawing his blade from his last victim, he noted that Crota

was being hard pressed by a burly Roy swordsman; so he hastened to his friend's assistance. And he was just in time, for even as Cabot approached, the naked Roy knocked the leather-clad Vairking's weapon from his hand with a particularly dexterous side-swipe, and thus had Crota at his mercy.

But before the naked one could follow up his advantage, the earth-man hurled his own sword like a spear, and down went the Roy, impaled through the back, carrying Crota with him as he fell.

Cabot paused to draw breath, and was just viewing with satisfaction the lucky results of his chance throw, when a peremptory command of "Yield!" behind him caused him to wheel about and confront a new enemy. The author of the shout was a massive furry warrior with a placid, almost bovine, face, which nevertheless betokened considerable intellect.

"And whom would I yield to, if I did?" asked Myles, facing unarmed the poised sword of this new enemy.

"Grod the Silent, King of the Roies," was the dignified reply.

"I thought that Att the Terrible was king of your people," returned the earth-man, sparring for time.

"That is what Att thinks too," answered the other with a slight smile.

But the smile was short-lived, for Myles Cabot, having momentarily distracted his opponent's attention by this conversation, stepped suddenly under the guard of the furry Grod, and planted his fist square on Grod's fat chin. Down crashed the king, his sword clattering from his nerveless hand. In an instant Myles snatched up the blade and bestrode his prostrate foe.

Just as he was about to plunge its point into Grod's vitals, there occurred to him the proverb of Poblath: "While enemies dispute the realm is at peace."

With Grod the Silent and Att the Terrible both contending for the leadership of the Roies, Vairkingia might enjoy a respite from the depredations of this wild and lawless race. He would leave the fallen Roy for dead, rather than put him actually in that condition. Accordingly, he sprang to the aid of his companions.

Crota was already back in the fray, his own sword in his hands once more, and the sword of his late burly opponent slung at his side. Quite evidently he did not intend to be disarmed again.

Three Vairking common soldiers and Crota and Myles now confronted seven Roies. This constituted a fairly even match, for the superior intelligence and the leather armor of the men of Vairkingi and Sur, offset the greater numbers of their aboriginal antagonists. What the outcome would have been can never be known, for at that moment, the reinforcements from the village came charging up the ravine; and at the same instant, the tops of the cliffs were lined with Roies, who sent a shower of arrows upon those below.

The contending twelve immediately separated, Cabot and his four followers passed within the protection of his rescuers and the return to Sur was renewed. The commander of the rescue party threw out a strong rear guard, and Vairking archers on both flanks peppered the cliff tops with sling shots and arrows, but the marauding Roies harassed every step of the retreat.

There was some respite when Cabot's party reached the plain where stood the rocky peak with the village of Sur on its summit, for arrows could not carry from the cover of the surrounding woods to the foot of the rocks. But, as the tired party began the ascent of the narrow path on the face of the cliff, they noted that the Roies were forming solid banks of wooden shields and were advancing across the plain.

Arrows now began to fly from below at the ascending Vairking party, several of whom toppled and fell down the face of the cliff. And then the warrior just above Myles on the narrow path clutched his breast with a gasp and dropped square upon the earth-man, who braced himself and caught the body, thus preventing it from being dashed to pieces at the foot of the rocks.

Whether or not the furry soldier was dead could not be ascertained until Myles should have reached the summit, so up he toiled with his burden until he gained the protection of the palisade, where he laid the Vairking gently on the ground and tore

open his leather tunic to see if any life were present.

The wounded man still breathed, though hoarsely, and his heart still beat; but there was a gaping hole in one side of his chest.

No arrow protruded from this hole. Myles tenderly turned the man over to see if the wound extended clear through. It did—almost. And from the man's side there projected the tip of a bullet, the steel-sheathed tip of a leaden rifle bullet!

CHAPTER X.

THE SIEGE OF SUR.

MYLES quickly extracted the bullet from the back of the wounded Vairking. Then tender furry female hands bore the victim away, as the earth-man stood in thoughtful contemplation of his find.

There could be no doubt of it. This was a steel-jacketed rifle bullet, identical with those used in the rifles of the ant-men. How came such a weapon in the hands of the savage and untrained Roies?

It was inconceivable that these uncultured brutes had overwhelmed New Formia and captured the weapons of the ant-men. No, the only possible explanation which occurred to him was that the Formians had formed an alliance with the Roies, and were either fighting for them or at least had furnished them with a few firearms, the use of which they had taught them.

But this last idea was improbable, due to the well-known shortage of rifles and ammunition at Yuriana, capital of the new ant empire. No, if the ant-men were in alliance with these furry savages, there must be ant-men present with the besiegers, and the shot in question must have been fired by the claw of a Formian.

This opened up new terrors for the village of Sur and its inhabitants. Myles glanced apprehensively at the southern sky, half expecting to see and hear the approach of a Formian plane, but the radiant silver expanse was unmarred by any black speck. Sur was safe for the moment.

His musings thus completed, Myles hurried to the public hall to communicate his

discovery to Crota and the village authorities. He found the headman already there in conference with Crota.

Said Myles, exhibiting the bullet: "Here is one of the magic stones thrown by one of my own magic sling-shots, which is capable of shooting from the ground to the top of your cliffs and even penetrating your palisade. It is big magic! With its aid, the Roies can overcome us. Without it, I am powerless. Therefore, we must secure possession of it. What do you suggest?"

Crota replied: "It is now sunset. Let us select a body of picked scouts and try and stalk the camp of the enemy."

"No, no!" exclaimed the headman of Sur in horror. "Never have our men dared to attack the Roies by dark."

"Do the Roies know this?" asked Myles with interest.

"Most certainly," was the reply.

"Then," said he, "all the more reason for attempting it. They will be unprepared."

The magistrate shrugged his furry shoulders with: "If you can persuade any men of Sur to attempt anything so foolhardy, I shall interpose no objection."

Within a twelfth of a day, Crota had enrolled twenty scouts, and with Myles Cabot, they had all begun the stealthy descent of the narrow winding path down the face of the cliff. Before starting, they had observed the direction of the Roy camp fires on one of the surrounding hills; so now they crept quietly toward that hill, and then slowly up to its crest.

In spite of the dense blackness of the Porovian night, they were able to find their way, first by starting in the correct direction and then by keeping the lights of their own village always behind them.

As Cabot had expected from the remarks of the headman, there were no sentinels on post, for the enemy were quite evidently relying on the well-known Vairking fear of the unknown terrors of the dark. Indeed, it spoke volumes for the individual courage of the twenty-one members of this venture, and for their confidence in their earth-man leader that they had dared to come.

Finally, the party emerged from the underbrush at the top of the hill, a few score of feet from the tents and camp fires of

the Roies. There, motioning the others to remain where they were until he gave a signal, Myles crawled forward, always keeping in the shadow of some tent, until he was able to peek through a small bush beside one of the tents, directly at the group around one of the camp fires.

Just as Cabot arrived at this observation post, a Roy warrior was declaiming: "I told you it would work, for had I not seen it demonstrated fully to me? You yourselves saw it kill. Now will you not believe me?"

Another spoke: "I cannot understand its principle. How can a weapon kill afar, and yet not resemble either a sling shot or a bow?"

And another: "Show us how it works, friend. Then perhaps we may be persuaded."

And a third: "I do not believe that he has it."

Whereat, the original speaker, nettled, spoke again: "It is in my tent there, you doubters," indicating the one beside which Cabot crouched.

Quick as a flash, Cabot wriggled beneath the back of the tent into its interior. The camp fire light, penetrating through the slit opening in front, revealed nothing but rumpled blankets on the floor, and ordinary weapons slung to the tent pole; so the intruder commenced rummaging among the bedding. The conversation outside continued.

"Prove, or be silent!" said a voice.

"You saw the Vairking fall, did you not?" replied the original speaker.

"True, but I did not see you sling any pebble."

Meanwhile, Cabot continued his frantic search. At last, it was rewarded. In one corner of the tent, his groping fingers closed upon a Formian rifle and a bandolier of cartridges. A thrill ran through him at the touch.

"To prove it to you," the voice outside was saying, angrily, "I will get it for you; and if you do not believe me, I shall sling shot you with it. *That* ought to be proof enough even for a stupid one like you. I have said it!"

"The signal for my exit," thought Myles,

as he hastened to crawl out through the back of the tent, but then he reflected: "No, I want more than this gun and ammunition; I want information."

So he remained.

As the Roy entered the tent and felt for the rifle, the crouching earth-man flung himself upon him; and before the startled furry one could utter even a gasp, strong fingers closed upon his windpipe, throttling off all sound. The struggle was over in a few moments.

When Myles Cabot finally crept out of the enemy tent, it was with a limp form under one arm, and a bandolier and a rifle slung across his shoulders.

The conversation at the camp fire continued.

One of the warriors was saying: "Our friend takes long to find his wonderful sling-shot. Methinks he was lying and does not dare to face us."

Said another voice: "Let us pull him from his tent and confront him with his perfidy."

At this, Myles sprang to his feet and ran to the cover which concealed his followers.

"Rush in among them as we planned," he urged, "while you two come with me."

Then on he sped down the hillside toward the lights of Sur with his captive and trophies and two previously-picked members of the band, while Crota and the remaining eighteen charged yelling into the midst of the Roy camp, upsetting tents, scattering camp fires, and laying about them with their swords. Straight through the camp they charged, shouting: "Make way for Att the Terrible!" Then they circled the hill under cover of the darkness and rejoined Myles.

The startled Roies were taken completely by surprise. From the cries of Crota and his followers, they assumed that the intruders were Roies, partisans of Att the Terrible, attacking them for being partisans of Grod the Silent. As they came rushing out of their standing tents, or crawled from beneath such tents as had been wrecked, they met others of their own camp, similarly rushing or crawling, and mistaking them for enemies, started to fight.

The confusion was complete, and never

for a moment did the naked furry savages suspect that the whole trouble had been caused by a mere handful of Vairkings.

Truly: "While enemies dispute, the realm is at peace."

While the Roy followers of Grod the Silent fought among themselves until they gradually discovered that there was no one there except themselves, Myles Cabot and his Vairkings safely regained the Village of Sur with the rifle, the ammunition, and the still unconscious Roy warrior.

In the public hall, under the tender ministrations of Vairking maidens—who would far rather have plunged a flint knife into him—the captive finally regained his senses and looked around him in bewilderment.

"Where am I?" he asked, rubbing his eyes.

"In Sur," some one replied.

"Then are we victorious? For never before has a Roy set foot in Sur."

"No, your forces are not victorious," Crota answered. "You are a prisoner. And it is only by the grace of Cabot the Minorian that you are permitted to come here even as a prisoner. For the men of Sur take no prisoners, and give no quarter."

"Who is this Cabot, who holds such powers of life and death?"

In reply, Myles himself stepped forward.

"I, myself, am Cabot the Minorian," said he.

To which Crota added impressively: "The greatest magician of two worlds!"

The prisoner shook his head.

"I know of only one world," he asserted, "and this man before me is dressed as a mere common soldier, as are all of you."

"Know then, oh, scum of Poros," admonished the earth-man, "that there are other worlds beyond the silver skies, and that in the world from which I come, all soldiers are gentlemen."

But the Roy warrior was not to be subdued by language.

"How did I come here?" he asked.

"You did not come here," Myles answered. "You were brought. I brought you."

"But how?"

"By magic."

"What magic?"

"My magic cart which swims through the air as a reptile swims through the waters of a lake."

"True," mused Roy, "there be such aerial wagons, for I have seen them near the city of the beasts of the south."

"Mark well!" interjected Myles to the assembled Vairkings, then to the prisoner again: "I captured you because you possessed the magic sling-shot, and presumed to use it on one of my own men. This effrontery could not be permitted to go unpunished; hence your capture. The offending weapon is now mine, and you are my prisoner."

"What do you propose to do with me?" asked the captive.

"I propose to ask you some questions," evaded Myles. "First, where did you get the magic sling-shot?"

"The great magician knows everything," replied the Roy, with a sneer. "Why, then, should I presume to tell him anything?"

But the earth-man remained unruffled.

"You are correct," he countered. "I ask, not because I do not already know, but because I wish to test whether it is possible for one of your degraded race to tell the truth."

"Why test that?" came back the brazen Roy, "for doubtless you, who know everything, know that, too."

Myles could not help admiring the insulting calm with which this furry man of inferior race confronted his relentless captors.

"Who are you, rash one?" he asked.

The prisoner drew himself up proudly, with folded arms, and answered: "I am Otto the Bold, son of Grod the Silent."

"Ah," said Myles, "the son of a king. And I am the father of a king. Well, then, as one man to another, and desisting for a moment from this battle of words, tell me where you got this gun."

"Gun?" queried Otto. "Is that the name of this weapon of bad omen? Know then that I got it from you yourself when I wounded you beneath the tree beside the brook at the foot of the mountains, before the Vairkings of Jud the Excuse-Maker drove me off. I have spoken!"

"And spoken truly," replied Cabot, concealing his surprise with difficulty. Of course. Why had he not guessed it before? But there were still some more points to clear up, so he continued: "Why did you shoot those two arrows at me in the house at the top of the mountains?"

"Because we wished to explore the house. But you killed my companion, whereupon I resolved to kill you in revenge, and to capture the noisy 'gun'—is that right? So I trailed you. The rest you know."

"Remember, I know *everything*," said Myles, smiling. "But did you ever see any one but me shoot the gun?"

"You know I never did," was the reply. "No one on Poros, save Cabot the Magician and Otto the Bold, has ever done this big magic. I saw the results, but not the means, when you killed my companion; so I experimented for myself after I had stolen your gun, and soon I learned how, after which I carefully conserved the magic stones until last night when I shot one of the Vairkings of Sur, so as to give visible proof of my magic powers to my doubting comrades."

The earth-man heaved a sigh of relief. There existed as yet no alliance between the Formians and the Roies. Pray Heaven that such a calamity would never suggest itself to the minds of either race; for if so, then woe to Vairkingia!

"Song of a king," said he, "return to your people and your father. Give him my greetings, and tell them that you are the friend of a great magician, who lent you his 'gun,' who transported you through the air to within the walls of Sur, where no Roy has ever stood or will ever stand, and who last night caused phantom warriors to attack your camp under the guise of followers of Att the Terrible. Go now. My men will give you safe conduct to the plain below."

"And what is the price of this freedom?" inquired Otto disdainfully.

"The friendship of a king's father for a king's son," replied Myles Cabot with dignity.

The two drew themselves up proudly and regarded each other eye-to-eye for a moment, then,

"It is well," said Otto the Bold. "Good-by."

And he departed under the escort of a Vairking guard.

"The master knows best," remarked Crota, sadly shaking his head, "but I should have run the wretch through the body."

The next morning Cabot thanked the headman of Sur for his hospitality, and took up the return trail for Vairkingi, the vacancies in his ranks being filled by the loan of soldiers from Sur. The party had gone but a short distance when they found the way barred by a formidable body of Roies. But before these came within bow-shot a bullet from Cabot's rifle brought two of them to the ground, whereupon the rest turned and fled precipitately.

Later in the day a bend in the road brought them suddenly upon a furry warrior. Myles fired, and the man instantly fell to the ground. But when they reached the body there was not even a scratch to be found on it; the bullet had missed.

"Dead of fright," thought Myles; but no, for the heart was still beating, although rapidly and faintly, and the lungs were still functioning.

"Sit up there!" ordered Myles.

"Can't," replied the Roy. "I'm dead."

"Then I'll make you alive again," said his captor, placing his hand on the head of the Roy. "*Abra cadabra camunya.*"

Thereat the soldier sat up with a sigh of relief, and opened his eyes.

"Stand up!" ordered Myles.

For reply the Roy jumped to his feet and started running for cover.

"Halt!" commanded the earth-man.

"Halt, or I kill you again!"

The man stopped.

"Return!"

The man returned, like a sleep walker.

"What do you mean by running away? Now listen intently. Are you one of the men of Grod?"

"Yes."

"Then go to Otto, the son of Grod, and tell him that it is the order of Cabot the Magician that Vairking expeditions into these mountains, in search of golden cubes

and other minerals, be unmolested. Tell Otto that he can recognize my expedition by the blue flags which they will carry hereafter. Now go. I have spoken."

The Roy warrior ran up the trail, and this time was not halted.

"Another mistake," remarked Crota, half to himself.

The rest of the return to Vairkingi was without event. On the way the radio man made notes of the best deposits of quartz, limestone, and fluorspar. Also he carried with him a few large sheets of mica. But he found no traces of galena, zinc ore, or platinum. These would require at least one further expedition.

You can depend upon it that Crota spared no extravagant language in relating to Jud the exploits of Cabot the Minorian in raising the siege of the village of Sur; and Jud repeated the story with embellishments to Theoph the Grim. Also the long deferred sleight of hand performance was held at the palace, to the great mystification of the white-furred king.

Arkilu did not show up to mar the occasion. In fact, little Quivven reported that her sister was very indignant at the earth-man for trifling with her affections, and had turned to Jud in her pique. Needless to say, Jud had taken every possible advantage of Cabot's absence to reinstate himself with the chestnut-furred princess. But neither Myles nor Quivven appeared to exhibit any very great sorrow at this turn of affairs.

So long as Arkilu's hostility did not become active the support of Jud and Theoph ought to prove quite sufficient.

The standing of Cabot the Minorian as a magician *par excellence* was now well established, and accordingly Jud the Excuse-Maker, and even Theoph the Grim were willing to accord to him all possible assistance in the gathering of the materials with which he was to perform his further magic, namely radio.

Theoph made a levy upon all the nobles, and turned over to the earth-man upward of five hundred soldiers with their proper carts and equipment. Jud (himself), Quivven (still unknown to her father), and Crota (the soldier who had demonstrated

on the expedition an intelligence far above his social class), were enrolled as laboratory assistants. Several inclosures adjoining Cabot's yard were vacated and converted into factories, in one of which were mounted a pair of huge millstones such as the Vairkings use in grinding certain of their food.

Myles divided his men roughly into three groups. One of these, under Crota, he established at the clay deposits to the north-east of the city, to make bricks and charcoal.

The second group, under Jud, were engaged in the mining operations, digging copper ore, quartz rock, fluorspar, limestone, and sand, at various points in the mountains, and carting some of the limestone to the brickyard, and the rest with the other products to Vairkingi. The carters carried back with them to the mountains all the necessary supplies for the expeditions.

The third group, under Quivven, were engaged in setting up the grist mill, and in other building and preparatory operations.

At the claypits the first operation was to scrape off the surface clay and spread it out thin in the open air, so that it would age quickly.

The limestone, upon its arrival at the brickyard, was burned in raw brick ovens, and then carted to Vairkingi, to be ground at the mill. It was then shipped back to the brick plant, where it was mixed with the aged clay—first screened—molded into bricks, baked, burned, and carted to Vairkingi, to be ground into cement.

Some of the ground limestone was retained at Vairkingi for use in later glass-making, and some of the unground for smelting purposes.

Other aged clay was screened, moistened, molded, and baked to form ordinary brick. Fire-brick was similarly made by the addition of white sand finely ground at Vairkingi, only this kind of brick had to be baked much more slowly.

Thus only a week or two after this whole huge industrial undertaking had begun, the radio man was in possession of fire-brick and fire-clay with which to start the building of the smelting furnaces.

Meanwhile Myles Cabot, with a small bodyguard, kept traveling from one job to another, giving general superintendence to the work. And when everything was well under way he set out on another exploring expedition in search of galena, zinc ore, and platinum.

Quivven had furnished the inspiration for this trip by suggesting that the sparkling sands of a large river, which ran from west to east, about a day's journey north of Vairkingi, might contain the silver grains which he sought. So thither he set out one morning, with camping equipment and a detachment of soldiers.

All day long they marched northward across the level plains. Toward evening they reached a small estuary of the main stream, and there they camped.

As the silver sky pinkened in the west Myles Cabot ran quickly down this brook to inspect the sands of the river, which lay but a short distance away.

The pink turned to crimson, and then purple. The darkness crept up out of the east, and plunged the whole face of the planet into velvet and impenetrable black. But Myles Cabot did not return to the camping place.

CHAPTER XI.

A PRISONER.

WHEN Myles Cabot left his encampment beside the little brook, he hastened down stream to where the brook joined the big river, along the edge of which there stretched a sandy beach. Falling on his knees, he picked up handful after handful of the silver sands, and let them sift through his fingers. Although the western sky was rapidly turning pink with the invisible setting sun, there was still plenty of daylight left for him to examine the multitude of shiny metallic particles.

There could be no doubt of it, these sands held some metal which could be separated out in much the same manner as that in which the California gold miners of 1849 used to wash for gold, but only time would tell whether or not this metal was the much-to-be-desired platinum which the radio man

needed for the grid, filament, plate, and wires of his vacuum tubes.

On the morrow he would wash for this metal, using the wooden pans which he had brought for that purpose. The precious dust he would carry back to Vairkingi, melt it into small lumps, if possible, and then try to analyze its composition in his laboratory.

As he sat on the sandy beach and thus laid his plans, his thoughts gradually wandered away from scientific lines, and he began again to worry about his Lilla, far away in Cupia, across the boiling seas. In fact, he never went for long without thinking and worrying about her whom he loved.

It was many days since she had sent the S O S which had recalled him from earth to Poros. Whatever she had feared must have happened by now. It was possible that he would never be able to effect a return to Cupia. Why not then accept the inevitable, settle down permanently among the Vairkings, and solace himself as best he could?

Even an ordinarily stalwart soul would have done his best and have been satisfied with that. But Myles Standish Cabot possessed that indomitable will which had given rise to the Porovian proverb: "You cannot kill a Minorian."

To such a man, defeat was impossible. He *would* rescue the Princess Lilla in the end; that was all there was to it.

So he laid his plans with precision, as he sat on the sandy shore of that Porovian river in the crimsoning twilight.

Before the velvet darkness completely enveloped the planet, the earth-man arose from the sands, and began his return up the valley of the little estuary. But, as he was hurrying along, and was passing through a small grove of trees, a dark form noiselessly dropped on him from above.

The creature lit squarely upon his back, wrapping its furry legs around his abdomen and its furry arms around his neck. Although taken completely by surprise, Cabot wrenched the creature's feet part and then threw it over his head as a bucking broncho would throw a rider, a jiu-jutsu trick which

he had learned from one of the Jap gymnasts at college.

The Roy, for that is what Cabot's assailant proved to be, scrambled quickly to his feet, although a bit stunned, and crouched, ready to spring at him again. The earth-man planted his feet firmly apart, clenched his fists, and awaited the onslaught; then, when the creature charged, he met him on the point of the jaw with a well-aimed blow. Down crashed the furry one!

Cabot was rubbing his bruised knuckles and viewing his fallen antagonist with some satisfaction, when suddenly he was seized around the knees from behind, and was hurled prone by one of the neatest football tackles he had ever experienced.

Squirming quickly to a sitting position, he dealt the Roy who held his legs a stinging blow beside the ear. The grip on his knees loosened, and he was just about to scramble erect, when a third assailant caught him around the throat and pulled him over backward. Then scores of these furry savages seemed to swarm upon him from every side. Yet, still he fought until his elbows were pinioned behind his back, his eyes were blindfolded, and a gag was placed between his teeth.

Thereupon, he ceased struggling, not because there was no fight left in him, but rather because he wisely decided to save his strength for some time when he might really need it. So he offered no further resistance when he was picked up and thrown across a pair of brawny shoulders, and carried off, he knew not whither.

Finally, after what seemed many hours, he was unceremoniously dumped onto the ground, and then jerked roughly to his feet.

His eye bandage was snatched off, and he found himself standing in the center of a circle of flares, confronting a large, squat, and particularly repulsive gray-furred Roy, who sat with some pretense of dignity upon a round boulder in front of him. Beside him stood another Roy, evidently the one who had brought him thither.

This one now spoke. "See the pretty Vairking which I have brought you."

"If that's a Vairking," remarked the fat one, "then I'm my own father."

"If he *isn't* a Vairking," countered the other, "then why does he wear Vairking leather armor? Answer me that."

"Vairking or not," said the fat one. "He will do very nicely to string up by the heels and shoot arrows at. For quite evidently, he is no Roy. What say you to that, my fine target?"

The guard removed the gag, so that the earth-man might answer.

"I say," replied Myles evenly, "that you had better not take any such liberties with me."

"And why not, furless?" sneered the seated Roy.

"First, let me ask *you* a question," said Myles. "Who is King of the Roies, Grod the Silent or Att the Terrible?"

"Grod the Silent, most assuredly. Why do you ask?"

"And do you know Prince Otto, his son?"

"Otto the Bold? Most assuredly."

"Know then," asserted the captive, "that I am no Vairking, but rather a Minorian, which is a sort of creature I'll venture you have never met with before. Furthermore, I am a particular personal friend of Otto the Bold. He will not thank you to string up Cabot the Minorian by the heels, and shoot arrows into him. I demand that I be taken before Prince Otto."

Thereat the fat Roy smiled a crafty smile.

"I shall take you before Att the Terrible," said he.

It thus became evident that this fat chieftain had falsely asserted his belief in the kingship of Grod for the purpose of securing from Myles an admission as to which side the earth-man favored.

The rest of the night Myles spent on a pile of smelly bedding in a tent. He was still bound, and was kept under constant surveillance by a frequently changing guard. By morning, his arms below the elbows had become completely numb, in spite of his having loosened his bonds somewhat by straining against them.

When the velvet night had given place to silver day, the guard brought some coarse porridge in a rough stone bowl, which he held to the prisoner's lips until it was all

consumed. Myles thanked him politely, and then asked if he would mind chafing the numb arms.

For reply, the soldier kicked him savagely.

"Get up!" said he. "'Tis time to start the march. You'll wish the rest of you were numb, too, when Att the Terrible starts shooting arrows into your inverted carcass."

Presently, Myles was driven into the open, the tents were struck and loaded onto carts—probably stolen from the Vairkings—and the furry warriors took up the march, with their prisoner in their midst. The fat chief alone rode in a cart; all the others walked.

By straining at the thongs which bound his arms, Myles further loosened them sufficiently to relieve the pressure on his blood vessels, and then by wiggling his fingers, he managed finally to restore the circulation.

After that, he began to take some interest in his surroundings.

His captors were a coarse-looking lot of brutes, with long gangling arms, thickset necks, low foreheads, and prognathous jaws. In general, they more closely resembled the anthropoid apes of the earth than they resembled the really human, although furred, Vairkings.

Their weapons—wooden spears and swords, and flint knives—were like those of the Vairkings, only cruder. They marched without any particular order or discipline, and jested coarsely with each other as they ambled along.

After taking in all this, Myles next turned his attention to the country through which they were passing. The trail led upward into mountains. This at once aroused his interest. Here and there he noted what he felt sure must be zinc-blende. Yes, and cropping out of the rocks on the left was an unmistakable rosette of galena crystal!

The radio man was sincerely glad that he had been captured. And so he even joked jovially with the soldiers around him, until they became quite friendly.

At one point, their route lay across a foaming mountain stream, by means of a

log bridge. As they were crossing over, one of the furry soldiers had the misfortune to stumble, and in another instant completely lost his footing and plunged headlong into the stream below. He happened to be one who had recently become particularly chummy with the captive.

"Poor fellow," remarked one of the guard casually. "It's too bad he can't swim."

"I can," shouted Myles. "Quick, some one cut my cords!"

And, before any one could interfere, a young and impetuous Roy had drawn his knife and severed the earth-man's bonds, thus permitting him to dive after the poor creature who was rapidly being washed down stream by the swift current.

It had all happened in an instant. A few swift strokes brought Myles up to the other. But it became no easy matter to reach the shore. However, the troop of Roies showed much more interest in regaining their captive, than they had shown in rescuing their comrade; and thus, by the aid of their spears, finally dragged the two ashore.

Then Cabot was bound again, and the march was resumed. The carts had detoured, and so the fat chief had not seen the episode.

"Better not tell him, any one," admonished one of the guard, "or it will go hard with the youngster. Our leader would not relish any chance of not being able to present this furless Vairking to Att the Terrible."

"And will Att shoot arrows into me?" asked Myles.

"Most assuredly."

Myles thought to himself: "I guess they are right, especially if Att knows how I was befriended by Arkilu, whom he covets!" Then he asked: "And when am I to see the Terrible One?"

"To-morrow morning," was the reply.

However, Myles Cabot fell asleep at the encampment that night wondering when he would get that radio set finished for a talk with Lilla and wondering whether that really was galena crystal which he had passed on the road.

But galena crystal wasn't going to help him any with Att the Terrible!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



Out of the Frying Pan

By ALMER CURTIS SANBORN

MANÁOS is the official distributing point of civilization and the actual necessities of life in the upper valley of the Amazon. In addition to that, it is hotter than Tophet. But near the pier is the Bolsa Universal, where ideas and articles of trade may be exchanged to the sound of ice tinkling in tall glasses of restorative liquids.

That is why Rogers and I were to be found at the Bolsa nearly every time a New York boat arrived. Rogers came to receive material for the maintenance of his ranch at Itácoatiara, and I was in charge of the trans-shipment of supplies to the company building the railroad up the Madeira.

We were least impressed in the culture which Manáos provided, however, because the boats usually brought in a few American tourists and most of them were dreadful bores. We avoided them as much as possible.

But the Bolsa was the first place they made for when they landed and walked up into the sizzling square in front of the

cathedral. It was the only place in sight where they could cool off. That was how we happened to meet Chandler.

Rogers was about to clap his hands to order another drink when he stopped short with a dejected glance at the doorway.

"Shall we have it or beat it?" he asked. "Here comes one of our dear fellow countrymen. He'll be over here in a minute with his 'Aren't-you-Americans' smile and stick his paw under our noses. I don't believe I could stand one of them to-day. Let's duck and go over to Vaughn's."

A young man who appeared to be not more than twenty-five had just stepped in from the street, where the heat was shimmering up from the cobblestones, carrying a suit case and perspiring profusely. He had all the earmarks of a college boy book agent. But, of course, he couldn't be that—not in the middle of the Brazilian jungle. So I became interested in him at once.

"Let's wait a minute," I said. "He's not an ordinary tourist, and I should like to see if we can make out what he's here for."

The newcomer took a seat back of me where I could not see him. Rogers, however, was regarding him intently. Suddenly, his lower jaw dropped.

"I'll tell you what he's doing here," he said. "He's hiding from the keepers of some asylum back home."

I moved quietly to the other side of the table where I could see without craning my neck.

The young man had taken an electric fan attached to wires, out of his suit case and placed it on the table. Just as I caught sight of him, he turned the fan toward him and pushed the switch. He leaned back in his chair, mopping his brow with a very wet handkerchief, and smiled contentedly.

"What's the answer?" asked Rogers turning to me.

"Why, I suppose he's hot," I replied.

Rogers was disgusted with me.

"Hot," he echoed. "Suppose he is! We all of us get hot sometimes. But this is the first time I've seen anybody carry a thing like that around with him."

"Well," I returned, "that simply shows how much more sensible he is than the rest of us."

"Oh, you make me sick," he snapped. "I'm going to find out who hurt him."

Meanwhile the Brazilians at the other tables had ceased their conversation to look at this phenomenon, and the buzzing of the fan had brought all the waiters to within a respectful distance of the table, where they stood grinning broadly and nudging each other.

"Pardon me," greeted Rogers. "Did you just come in on the Bregwin?"

The other ceased mopping his forehead, tucked the wet handkerchief into his hip pocket, and ran a stubby forefinger around the inside of his wilted collar.

"Yes," he said. "Just came off in the tug. Won't you sit down?" He waved toward the other two chairs at the table. "Gosh, but it's hot down here in this country. Perhaps you'd like some of this breeze."

He turned the fan around so that the full force of it set the sparse hairs on Rogers's head waving frantically.

"No, thanks," Rogers declined, blinking in the cyclonic blast. "You keep it. We get used to the heat. Do you carry that thing around with you all the time?" he asked without the slightest attempt to conceal his curiosity.

The other smiled joyously.

"I had an idea an electric fan would make you people sit up and take notice," he said. "This is only a sample. I've got a thousand more out there in the Bregwin."

"A thousand more!" repeated Rogers. "What in the name of Sam Hill do you want with a thousand of 'em?"

The young man seemed a little surprised at Rogers's exclamation. He reduced the fan to half speed. But he did not abandon his joyous tone.

"I'm going to sell them," he said.

Rogers's apparent idea of sustaining a conversation was to repeat detached phrases from his interlocutor's remarks.

"Sell 'em," he echoed. "Why, you've got just about as much chance of selling electric fans here as you'd have of selling a chrysanthemum to an Eskimo."

The young man bristled up a little at that. "Would you advise going to Siberia with them? I've made up my mind to sell one thousand electric fans in the Amazon Valley, and I'm going to do it." He emphasized each word with a determined nod at Rogers.

Rogers prides himself on his business sagacity and his knowledge of the Amazon and he doesn't like to have either of them questioned. I was afraid the other's insistence might make him angry, but he seemed to be in a charitable mood.

"Listen here," he said. "Let me show you what you're up against. Manáos is the only town within a thousand miles that has an electric plant, and all the people here who want electric fans have got 'em. Besides, the stores here keep 'em in stock. As for the Indian villages and jerkwater rubber towns scattered around in the jungle, the people there wouldn't know an electric fan from a marriage certificate. They couldn't use 'em. There's no electricity within miles of 'em, except when it rains.

"You've made a bum steer in picking out your line of goods. If you'd brought

down a cargo of glass beads or secondhand silk hats, it might have been different, but electric fans simply won't do. You take a tip from me and don't land that consignment of whirligigs you've got out there in the harbor. You just step around to the shipping office and prepay the freight back."

The young salesman became suddenly grave. He reached over and turned off the fan.

"No doubt you're right," he said, a little crestfallen; then added with determination: "But I've got to go through with this thing. I can't back out now. You see, I inherited some money a little while ago. I wanted to see the world, and I figured that with the capital I had, I could pay my way as I went along. So I hit on the electric fan proposition, studied Portuguese and came down here. I'll be up against it, if I don't get rid of this stuff."

Rogers had been studying the young man intently.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, finally. "I've got a *fazenda* down the river at Itácoatiara. I'm the only American in the place and I get pretty lonesome sometimes. Henderson, here, is away more than half the time. Suppose you come down and live with me for awhile. It's as good a place as any for you to try out this fan proposition, but let me tell you beforehand that when you hear that there's an electric plant in Itácoatiara, you'll know they've started a grape juice factory in Spitzbergen. What do you say?"

The young man was clearly delighted with the proposal and accepted eagerly. Then we exchanged cards and found that his name was Chandler and that his home town was Albany. Rogers arranged to meet him at three o'clock and have the fans sent down to Itácoatiara with his own supplies.

When Rogers and I reached the street, he turned to me abruptly.

"Say," he said. "I've been rung in on some cuckoo propositions before, but this is the first time I ever agreed to promote something nobody wanted in a place where they couldn't use it. But I want that infant where I can watch him. Something might happen to him, if he roamed around here loose, and nerve such as he's got is

worth preserving. We'll expect you down at the ranch as soon as you get your supplies disposed of."

And we parted.

II.

It was fully two weeks before I was able to get back to Itácoatiara. As Rogers and I never wrote to each other, I knew nothing of what might have happened to Chandler until I stepped off the stern-wheeler and found my friend on the landing stage.

"I thought you might come on this boat," he greeted me. "I was in town getting some stamped paper and other things, so I waited to see."

"Stamped paper!" I exclaimed. "What do you want of that? Going to make your will?"

"Oh, it's all this business of Chandler's," he replied. "He's going to make out a contract with the commandante to furnish him with fans for the next five years. Had to do it to pacify him. The old geezer wanted to give him the concession in perpetuity, but they finally compromised on five years. He's written to the governor at Manáos for authorization to buy fans for the whole garrison. The reply's on this boat, I expect; so Chandler wants the stamped paper ready."

"He's really making good?" I exclaimed.

"You bet your sweet life he is. That lunatic's the most popular man in the place just now. Those whirligigs have gone like free tickets to a baseball game. These Brazzies simply fell over themselves to get them."

"But how on earth—" I began.

"Wait a minute! That boy's there when it comes to salesmanship. He handed them a lot of guff about how Itácoatiara is to become the metropolis of the Upper Amazon as soon as this railroad up the Madeira is finished, and they swallowed it the way a baby does gum."

"But they can't run the fans," I objected.

"Of course not. But he told them that they ought to get a high-class fan now, so as to be prepared when the electric plant is built, because the price would go up then.

Anyway, that doesn't matter. They use 'em for parlor ornaments and call around at the house every once in awhile to see Chandler's run. Three of 'em have had their fingers cut off already trying to stop it when Chandler wasn't looking. But don't mind. They think it's part of the game."

When we reached the *fazenda*, we found Chandler sitting on the veranda, looking rather downcast. His fan stood motionless on the table beside him.

"Hello," I said. "Not looking so cheerful. What's the matter?"

"My last battery has gone blooey. The damned climate, I suppose," he said, gloomily. "I had ten natives here this afternoon with their eyes hanging out on their cheeks. I'd just sold three fans and then this blooming imp of Satan stopped. Of course, I pretended I'd stopped it on purpose, but something about my actions must have given the game away, for they insisted on seeing it run some more. When they found I couldn't start it, they got mad. I tried to explain to them what the trouble was, but I couldn't get it through their bovine noodles at all. The three that had bought fans wanted their money back, and they all went away cursing."

Just then the Indian maid, whom Rogers calls his Inca princess, came out and called us to supper. I could see that Rogers was preoccupied. All through the meal, he scarcely said a word. At last he rose to fill his pipe.

"It's too bad you didn't order new batteries from Manãos sooner," he said. "You'll have to watch your step for a few days until they get here. If these Brazzies once get sore on you, there's no knowing what they may do. We'll hope for the best, but if things get too hot for you, you'll have to beat it. That's all."

As he came back to the table, puffing nervously, he glanced out of the window.

"Good heaven!" he exclaimed. "They've come. Get ready for 'em. We'll try to stave 'em off."

Chandler and I both jumped up and joined Rogers at the window.

Coming up the road toward the *fazenda* was a long procession of half-naked natives, each carrying a fan under his arm. The

long green cords trailed behind them in the dust. It was about half an hour before sunset and the lengthening shadows gave the mob a weird aspect.

There were fully a hundred of them, and it was easy to see from their faces, as they flocked into the open space in front of the house, that they meant business. I began to fear that Chandler's success with the fans had only got him into a worse predicament. He seemed a little pale, but his jaw was set.

"What do you suppose they'll do to me?" he asked.

"There's no telling," said Rogers. "What you've got to do, my boy, is to promise to refund their money. They'll probably want it right away, but maybe you can hold them off and give yourself time to duck. If they insist on having it now, though, you give it to 'em. They're in no mood to be monkeyed with."

But it was of no use. Chandler had his fortune at stake.

"No, sir," he said, with a shake of his head. "I won't give in until I've tried everything else."

By this time the natives were crowding up on the veranda. Under any other circumstances, it would have been an amusing sight, these children of the jungle, who were merely on a furlough from savagery, gazing in at the windows and clutching those incongruous electric fans as though they were some deadly weapon.

But at that moment, we saw only the danger which their faces foreboded. Suddenly, a half-breed negro and Indian, dressed only in a breech cloth, appeared at the window where we were standing. He had the cord of his fan wrapped about his arm like a long green serpent with an enormous bronze-colored head.

"What do you want, Diogo?" asked Rogers.

"We want Senhor Chandler," he replied viciously. "He must give us back our money. He has lost his power. He can no longer make the fans go."

Rogers was about to reply when Chandler stepped forward. We tried to stop him, but too late. An ominous growl rose from the crowd, as it caught sight of him.

I could see that he was beginning to be a little frightened, but not half so much as Rogers and I were. One of those hare-brained natives might fire at him at any minute. But Chandler held up his hand for silence.

"I will return your money," he said and paused.

That was a promise, and the natives became quiet immediately. Chandler took advantage of the calm to continue:

"You should have had patience. All your fans would have been running in a month." He drew a letter from his pocket and waved it in the air. "I have received word to-day that the electricity is coming. In a month the plant will be started, and wires will be stretched to your houses which will carry the electricity to turn your fans. Then you will be able to sit in your huts and enjoy the same breeze in the heat of midday that nature provides you at night."

He began to be really eloquent for a man who was speaking in a foreign tongue. It was pretty bad Portuguese, but the natives understood it. Moreover, they were quiet and, so far as one could tell, were interested.

Chandler warmed up to his theme and explained how machines would soon arrive that would draw the electricity from the air and the lightning from the sky to make their fans whirl. Here Rogers nudged him.

"Cut that sky stuff," he whispered. "They won't get that."

So Chandler changed his course and told them the exact spot where the plant would be located and where the wires would run, and was getting himself entangled in a mass of impromptu detail when the crowd began to get restless, and Diogo interrupted:

"When do we get our money?"

"To-morrow," replied Chandler.

The anger of the mob increased at this exasperating delay.

"We want it now," insisted the half-breed.

"You can't have it," shouted Chandler, angrily. "I will give it to you to-morrow."

He evidently wanted to try what a little determination would do, but it was an ill-advised maneuver. The mob surged forward.

"You damn fool!" cried Rogers. But his voice was drowned by the howling of the crowd.

We had barely time to pull Chandler back through the window and slam the shutters when there was a deafening crash as some fifteen or twenty fans were hurled against the house. A shot rang out and the bullet splintered through the upper part of the shutter.

"Try to get away through the back of the house," said Rogers, pushing Chandler toward the hall door. "It's your only chance. They may not see you in the cacao trees. We'll keep them here as long as we can."

But Chandler never reached the hallway. As he opened the door he was confronted by the commandante and ten of his men. Two of them seized him. At that moment the shutters crashed in, and the throng of natives swarmed through. Chandler's only hope of safety now lay in the presence of the commandante, but even that might be only temporary security.

The commandante held up his hand to stop the mob.

"You are under arrest," he said, turning to Chandler.

The young man rose to the occasion magnificently.

"Why?" he asked with an air of bewilderment.

"Because you are a fraud and have obtained money under false pretenses," answered the officer. "I have here a letter from the Governor of the State of Amazonas which says there will be no electricity at Itácoatiara."

"Let us have him!" shrieked some one in the crowd.

"No. We will try him first," replied the commandante with a show of great magnanimity. "Take him to the guardhouse, men."

Chandler made one more desperate effort.

"One moment, Senhor Commandante," he said, as the soldiers started to march him away. "His excellency the governor does not know. I intended all the time to form the company myself and make you its first president with a big salary. See!" he

continued, drawing forth the stamped paper which Rogers had brought for an entirely different purpose. "I have here the paper to make all the arrangements. You let me have the concession for the plant and I make you president of the Itácoatiara Light and Power Company."

The commandante hesitated and was lost. The dignity of the new title appealed to him.

Chandler then continued to explain his scheme, which he invented as he went along. Convincing detail was his only hope of salvation.

He said it would be a coöperative company. All subscribers would bear the expense of operation in proportion to the number of fans they had. Everybody would be assessed ten milreis in the beginning to get the plant started. He had already ordered materials from New York, and the work would begin as soon as they arrived.

Chandler's technicalities were all lost on the commandante, however, except in so far as they showed his sincerity. It was the fact that he was president of the new company that decided him in the young man's favor. He turned and glared at the escort.

"Release Senhor Chandler," he ordered, as though it were the fault of the soldiers that Chandler had been arrested. The soldiers obeyed with alacrity.

Then he dismissed the natives by explaining that he was president of the Itácoatiara Light and Power Company, and would see that justice was done them. Some of the crowd still resented not having their money refunded, but a few cheered, and presently the others joined in making the surrounding jungle ring with "Vivas" for the commandante. For the moment the tension was relieved and the natives trudged back to their homes.

Chandler and the commandante spent the next hour drawing up their contract. Rogers and I simply looked at each other and laughed immoderately. The reaction was overwhelming. As soon as the others had finished, we toasted the president-elect and shook hands with him heartily as he departed. It was nearly midnight before any

of the three of us was calm enough to go to a somewhat troubled sleep.

III.

I WAS very tired and slept later than usual the next morning. When I descended to the dining room I found Rogers and Chandler sitting by the open windows, the pictures of gloom.

"What's happened now?" I exclaimed. "You look like a couple of mutes at an undertaker's funeral."

"Tell him," said Chandler sulkily.

"Well," explained Rogers testily, "this prime idiot has simply jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. He overdid things last night. All that guff of his about the new company spread through the town like measles through a flat, and by four o'clock this morning the natives had besieged the place, bringing their ten milreis for the first assessment. Those that didn't have the money brought cocoa beans and balls of rubber. There was no getting rid of 'em. We simply had to take their junk. Now they'll be madder than ever when he doesn't make good on this."

"Why, that's easy," I said. "Use the money to start the plant. Then when they get tired of paying—"

"Don't talk like a fool," Rogers interrupted. "Ten milreis from each of these Brazzies wouldn't begin to cover the initial outlay."

"Then the only thing to do is beat it," I replied, sitting down and pouring my chocolate. "Of course, we shall be sorry to lose Chandler, but it can't be helped. It's—"

This time Chandler interrupted me.

"But I can't get away," he said. "The commandante's got one of his black-face comedians stationed out there in the cacao trees now. And he probably has orders to shoot me if I try to escape."

"Then you're in for it," I returned rather unfeelingly. "Keep up your bluff a few days, though, and perhaps he'll call off his dog. Or else, Rogers and I may find a scheme for keeping your chaperon occupied while you make your get-away in a canoe. It's useless to try the boat, of

course. But above all, don't let on you're scared."

"They'd tear me from limb to limb if I offered to refund their money now, I suppose," Chandler hazarded.

"Just as well commit suicide," put in Rogers. "It's too late for that."

"Heaven only knows how it will turn out, then," groaned the other. "I seem to have stirred up quite a whirlwind with my fans." He straightened in his chair. "But you just watch me. I'll get out of this yet!"

There was plenty of grit in Chandler. He kept up a bold front, called on the commandante that afternoon, and told him more of his plans for the new company. He showed himself fearlessly about the village, and the natives began to get back their old confidence in him.

Rogers's canoe was placed in the bush near the bank of the river just below the ranch, where it could be launched at a moment's notice. We all had our eyes open for the first opportunity that Chandler might have to escape.

As a matter of fact, there was so much excitement the next afternoon that he could easily have got away under cover of it, had he not been attacked by another of his brilliant ideas. Ideas were fatal to him. Rogers and I both pleaded with him to seize the chance, but he flatly refused.

It was about three o'clock that the private yacht of Herr Schnikelfritz—I have forgotten his right name, but that is what Rogers called him, and it serves the purpose—grounded on a shoal near the bank in front of the *fazenda*. She struck with the current and went on so hard that the mere reversing of the engines was not sufficient to pull her off.

The whole village was greatly excited. Not a stroke of work was done for the rest of the day. The garrison turned out to a man to offer advice and give the moral support of their presence to the vain attempts of the crew to get the boat free. Even the man who was detailed to shadow Chandler left his post, and we saw him sitting on the bank, utterly unmindful of his duty.

It was then that we tried to persuade our friend to escape, but he too was interested

in the yacht's plight, and said he wanted to wait until he saw what happened. To all our entreaties he merely replied that he had an idea that would get him out of trouble with colors flying if he got a chance to work it.

"It will get you in deeper if it's anything like those other ideas you've had," said Rogers angrily.

It was impossible to do anything with him, so we gave up trying and decided to leave him to his own devices.

After two hours of useless labor, the crew gave up their attempts to get the yacht free and the disgruntled Schnikelfritz came ashore.

"All my troubles come at once," he moaned. "I am a ruined man already, and then this happens."

He capered about and cursed his fate. We tried to comfort him by saying that a strong tug could be brought from Manáos which would pull the yacht off easily.

"But I must get away," he cried. "I cannot wait."

Then we heard his story.

He had come out from Germany three years before and had gone into the rubber business. He had opened up rich new districts in the back country. The first two years he had been extraordinarily successful and had laid by a considerable fortune. Rubber has made many a millionaire overnight. He had built a large house in Manáos and had bought this yacht from a former governor of Pará.

This year he had sunk all his ready money and a large amount he had borrowed in rubber, hoping to retire and live in luxury the remainder of his days. But the rainy season had been short. The river had risen comparatively little and his rubber was rotting at the headwaters of the Javary and the Uçayali, because no boats could get up to bring it down.

His creditors came down on him, and he could not pay. He had taken the only means of escape he saw, which was to board his yacht and start for Germany.

Chandler seemed to take a fiendish delight in this recital of calamities, and he could scarcely wait until the German had finished.

"There's a boat down river to Pará this evening," he said. "It will get you there in time for next Wednesday's Hamburg-American liner. I would be glad to look after your yacht in the meantime until you send me orders from Germany what to do with it."

The other accepted the offer eagerly. Rogers and I were nonplused. We could not for the life of us see through Chandler's scheme, and it was not until after old Schnikelfritz had taken the boat that we could get him to explain.

"Didn't you see all those electric lights on the deck?" he exclaimed. "And that big searchlight on the bridge? She's a swell little vessel, and I'll bet you she's fitted up with machinery that will run our fans like a top. Get the idea? I'm going to give these blooming Brazzies their electric plant. All I have to do is get wire from Manáos and have the natives cut poles out of the jungle. Run a wire from the dynamo on the yacht, attach it to the wires on shore, and the whole thing's done. We'll have this place so cool it'll be the leading summer resort for New Yorkers.

Rogers and I looked at each other and gasped. We could pick no flaws in *this* scheme. Chandler had made good at last, and we told him so.

We had a real celebration that night, and I left the next day for Porto Velho. The same boat that had taken the German down to Pará had brought me orders to go up to the headquarters of the railroad for a month. Thus, much to my disgust, I was obliged to leave in the midst of Chandler's triumph.

I returned, however, just in time for the inauguration of the Itácoatiara Electric Fan Service. The preparations had been completed and the current was to be turned on that evening. A ball had been planned for the celebration and the whole village was getting ready for the fête. It was a gala day for Itácoatiara.

Chandler showed me his plant. He had built a small house on the bank of the river to fool the natives. He had placed the electric donkey engine from the yacht inside, and explained to them that this was the machine that generated the electricity.

Of course the engine was run by the current from the boat, but Chandler had not dared allow them to know the real source of his power. All the houses had been wired and the fixtures placed for attaching the fans. Rogers, I found, had one in every room. All the natives had supplied themselves with at least one.

Chandler's popularity in the place was a thing to be envied. It was a pity it could not have lasted.

The celebration was a gorgeous affair. The whole village was present. Chandler made a speech amid rousing cheers, and the commandante pushed the switch that turned on the current and set all the fans in the town to buzzing. It was a triumph for Chandler, and Rogers and I were not sparing in our congratulations.

The ball which followed was weird and fantastic, due largely to the fact that all the natives drank freely of the *mucuru*, a most deadly drink, which had been provided for the occasion. They seemed to consider it criminal to neglect an opportunity to get drunk for nothing.

It was late when Rogers and I parted from Chandler, who was going to sleep on board the yacht to see that no untoward accident occurred the first night to arouse the anger of the natives. By that time many of them were laid out on the grass, and the remainder were staggering through some pagan dance evolved by their forefathers.

Shouts and curses down by the river awakened us the next morning. We rushed to the window and looked out. A crowd had gathered about Chandler's "plant." The yacht which had been stranded in the stream beyond was gone. Rogers reached over and turned the switch of the fan on the table. It refused to move.

"Here's more trouble for that lunatic," he said as we hurriedly got into some clothes.

We ran down to the plant and went in. Lying on the motionless donkey engine was a letter addressed to Rogers. He snatched it up and tore it open to read:

DEAR ROGERS:

That interfering company in Pará, that insured the German's yacht, has sent up two

tugs to pull her off and tow her to port. They came early this morning. They're yanking her off now. I shall go with her. I know you would advise it. I've made their fans go for awhile, anyway. Thanks for all you and Henderson have done for me. I'll write again as soon as I get down river. Hastily,
CHANDLER.

We had just finished reading the letter when the commandante bustled in.

"Where is Senhor Chandler?" he asked.

"The plant has broken down."

"He's been called away on business,"

answered Rogers. "He's got a commission to sell foot warmers in the Congo."

We stepped out and looked down the river. The Itácoatiara Light and Power Company was just disappearing around the point of the Ilha Grande da Serpa. We could make out the figure of her promoter, standing at the stern, waving frantically at us with his Panama.

"Well," said Rogers with a note of regret, "I'm sorry to see him go. Damned if he didn't make good after all."

THE END



WHOSE BIRTHDAY?

"I WONDER who *is* Uncle Sam—
I ain't ever seen him.

I've seen my Uncles Bill, an' Ted,

An' Louis, Ray, an' Jim:

They give me nickels when they come—

I hope my Uncle Sam has some.

"Pop says we have to cel-e-brate

His birthday—like my own;

Then he gi' me ten cents, an' I

Bought an ice cream cone;

An' pop says: 'Well, by golly! Say,

It's Uncle Sam's—not *your* birthday!'

"I'd like to see my Uncle Sam—

He must be bigger'n pop;

Th' way they cel-e-brate, I bet

He's bigger than our cop!

Well, I got some torpedoes, an'

A pistol—an' I shot a man!

"Tim—our mailman, in th' pants!

I says: 'I'm cel-e-brat-in', Tim.

Do you know Uncle Sam?' He says:

'Sure, I do—I work f'r him!'

What do you know about that, hey?

He's real—an' this is his birthday!"

R. E. Alexander.



Worth Millions.

By **RICHARD BARRY**

Author of "Jee' Sal," "Sea Lure," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

PATRICK HENRY NELSON, an eccentric old flower fancier who has tutored his only daughter privately, wills her to young Peter Killigrew, the most influential millionaire in all Westchester County. Peter is not interested, but Old Scroggins, the superintendent of the Killigrew estate, investigates with his wife. They discover the girl, Imogen Nelson, to be an instinctive aristocrat, and quietly send her to a fashionable boarding school as "the ward of the Killigrews." There she is acclaimed the "find" of a generation as an aristocrat; and is courted by people because of her supposed connection with the Killigrews. Darcy Jennifer, a wild young man who has defrauded Peter of twenty thousand dollars, forms the plan of marrying Imogen to stave off prosecution for the fraud. Jennifer kidnaps her in an airplane. Distracted, Scroggins rushes to tell Peter. To the old superintendent's surprise, his young master suddenly becomes interested—and agrees to help look for Imogen.

CHAPTER XIX.

A DEEP-LAID SCHEME.

SCROGGINS was not very far wrong. He had made a shrewd guess on insufficient evidence

To understand fully the complex passions which were hastening this affair to a climax, while they hurled Imogen across the wintry face of the State of New York,

it will be necessary to retrace slightly the recent adventures of Darcy Jennifer.

On the previous Wednesday—preceding the night of his first proposal—Darcy had been summoned to the Killigrew offices early in the morning to face McKenna. Peter was not there.

Mac confronted him with an affidavit, sworn to before a notary, and signed by a registered civil engineer, declaring that the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 12.

lands of the so-called "Liberty Rubber Company" in Liberia were practically worthless, being in a dense swamp, inaccessible, and with no prospect of development.

A month before Darcy had sold bonds in this company to Peter Killigrew, and had taken therefor his personal check for twenty thousand dollars. He had represented, first by letter, and then orally, that the lands were rich with rubber trees, and had added a few other vivid details, such as a description of a crude rubber refinery, a godown, a railway, and a terminal. Pure fiction, or rather, impure fiction; criminal, to be exact; criminal in the eyes of the County of New York, where the lies had been told to get money; and criminal in the courts of the United States, whose mails had carried the lies for the same sordid purpose.

Jennifer blubbered, and begged for a chance to see Mr. Killigrew. Mac was not affected by the tears in the eyes of the young man. He said, however, Mr. Killigrew would be lenient if the money was returned immediately.

"How can I return it," cried Jennifer, "when I got only eight thousand of it?"

"Ah," said Mac, "forty per cent commission for selling. Pretty steep, I'd say."

"I never was in Liberia," Darcy protested.

"Evidently not," Mac admitted.

"I thought the rubber trees were there, and the godown, and everything!"

"You 'hoped' it—for forty per cent commission."

"Selling those bonds is worth forty per cent. A salesman has to keep up a lot; it costs money."

"I have no doubt. But if you want to escape the Tombs you will have to return the full amount at once."

Jennifer pleaded for time. Mac gave him twenty-four hours. As a parting shot he made a slip—very unusual for Mac—in saying, "It is only Mr. Killigrew's desire to avoid publicity for your father and himself that induces him to be as lenient to that extent with you."

That word "publicity" stuck in Darcy's mind. Until now, and in the presence of most serious consequences as the result of

his unsound methods of making a living, he had not considered how he could play on this "desire to avoid publicity." It took several hours to make up his mind—and extremity. He was really desperate before he seized on Mac's chance words, meant only to emphasize the acuteness of his peril. Before long, however, they presented to him the idea of a way out of his trouble.

First, he made one more effort to locate his "principals," the Messrs Creinsky and Dovekin, who had engaged him, because of his entree to exclusive clubs, his personal front, and his father's name, to sell the rubber bonds—and to pocket forty per cent of the gross.

The offices they had maintained in a Fifth Avenue building had not been opened for four days. He induced the superintendent to let him in. The desks were in disarray, every evidence that they had departed.

As a matter of fact, Creinsky and Dovekin had known for four days the jig was up. At the first hint of investigation they had destroyed all written evidence of their activities, taken their available cash, and lit out.

Jennifer in disgust and despair upbraided himself, though silently, of course. "What a boob!" he said. "To let them get away with sixty per cent!"

To his credit it must be added that he began to calculate that if he had the sixty per cent he might square himself, for his only sale had been to Peter Killigrew, and he still had nearly four thousand dollars of the eight he got for his single sale.

He might possibly have raised four thousand—but twenty! That was a stiff sum, especially for a young man who had previously exhausted his credit and his financial standing.

Jennifer went straight to his father's office, however. The elder Jennifer, his secretary told him, had gone to Cleveland and Toledo for a ten-day trip. Darcy got the Cleveland hotel address, and managed to locate his father on long distance. He did not dare go into details over the phone. He merely stated that he was obliged to have sixteen thousand, five hundred dollars by the next noon.

"I couldn't produce that much cash for

you by to-morrow noon to save you from the penitentiary," shouted Jennifer, senior, just to make it strong.

"That's what it will mean if I don't get the money," gasped Darcy.

"Don't be an ass! And don't call me on long distance again—not on my own phone bill," came the sharp rejoinder, as the phone was disconnected.

Jennifer, senior, evidently did not take the penitentiary threat seriously. Darcy went outside to a booth, and tried to get him again, but failed. He asked that a call be left, and waited in his father's office to have it honored, but no reply came. Darcy considered taking the train for Cleveland, but he immediately had a lively vision of what would happen the following day if he did not appear at the Killigrew offices, and he did not want to further arouse suspicion of his honest intention by leaving town.

It was only then, while waiting vainly for a long distance from Cleveland, that he thought of Imogen at the Morton School. When he first met her at the Henton home he had started in to cultivate her solely because she was "the ward" of Peter Killigrew, and it was part of his instinct as a "go-getter" salesman of securities to the gilded rich to neglect no avenue to their better acquaintance. He had fortunately laid the foundation for a campaign which circumstances might compel him to quicken.

Now that word "publicity" dropped so glibly by Mac sprang to his cornered and harassed mind.

Leaving word to have his father held for him if he called, and to keep that wire clear, he went downstairs and called up the school, and made the date for the afternoon tea at the road house.

When he went back his sister Lenly was there in his father's office. This was annoying, for if his father should call back, as requested, from Cleveland, he would not want to go into any further details before Lenly. But he really had little hope his father would ring him again.

Lenly, however, presented assistance in another direction. She could help him with Imogen. To accomplish this he felt he had to tell her something of his dilemma, though he glossed over its more sinister aspects.

He neglected to mention the possibilities of the Tombs and Atlanta. If he had confided this very definite menace Lenly might not have said he was "insane" when he told her he wanted to marry Imogen, and without delay.

Before that Lenly had offered to let him have her jewels. "A bag of shucks," said Darcy. "Couldn't raise a thousand on them. Need over sixteen thousand."

So Lenly invited Imogen to dine at the Jennifer home that night, and when Darcy made his rather impromptu proposal later, she was deeply concerned to know all about it. She seemed to be relieved to learn Darcy had not been successful.

"It would be a stupid thing to do," she assured him, "and I hope you forget it."

"Don't you like the kid?" Darcy asked.

"Oh! She's nice enough—rather a shy little kitten—but you ought to remember the old adage, 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure.'"

"They said that in the old days—before they brought the divorce courts up to snuff. Who is going to let a little thing like a mistake in marriage stop him these days?"

"But it's not nice to think of divorce before you're married."

"It's not sensible not to recognize a way out before you go in. Besides, I may like her—she's an intelligent little thing. She may brush up."

"But you are not settled enough to get married, Darcy."

"When I am settled, will you guarantee me a chance to marry into the Killigrews?"

She did not reply.

"I'll take my chance when I have it," Darcy hotly added.

He dashed away from the Larches that morning—Thursday—without going into further detail with his sister. A plan was already coming to life in his brain. And it would require a deal of working out. He drove in, and before he crossed the Harlem River, he had perfected the chief details.

Time was essential. He would have to get more time. So he drove straight to the Killigrew offices, which he reached even before Mac's arrival, at his accustomed nine thirty.

"I have come early, Mr. McKenna," he said, "to tell you I can't possibly raise that money to-day. I must have more time."

"I have no authority to grant that, Mr. Jennifer."

"Will you ask Mr. Killigrew?"

"Won't do any good."

"But I haven't the money, and if I had a little time I am sure I could get it for you."

"How much time do you want?"

"A week."

"I'll put the proposition up to Mr. Killigrew. Call me at noon and I will let you know."

At noon Mac told him Mr. Killigrew had consented to give him until the following Wednesday at noon, practically a week.

"Thanks," said Jennifer. "That's all I need."

Then he got Imogen on the phone and made the appointment for Saturday morning. Just where and how he would accomplish the rest of his design was not clear. Chance dictated it.

While waiting for noon and the assurance from Mac he had studied the "want ads" in a morning paper, until he found something that seemed to be just what he was looking for. It read:

FOR RENT—Adirondack cabin, fully equipped for winter; three master rooms, three baths; larder stocked with staples; fishing, hunting near by; reasonable to reliable tenant; near head of Schroon Lake. Phone Owner, Caledonia 10005.

As soon as he was sure of meeting Imogen Saturday morning, he called the Caledonia number, and found the owner of the Adirondack cabin to be a bachelor who had usually occupied it in the winter, as well as in the summer, but who was prevented this season from making his accustomed sojourn. He was more eager to have it occupied and cared for than to secure the rent. In a short half hour, Darcy was able to convince him of his desirability, and had paid down an advance, and had the keys.

The location of the cabin was some miles south of Elizabethtown. One could take the night train, go straight through, get off at Westport in the morning, and engage a

conveyance to get to the cabin early that day by way of Elizabethtown.

About twelve hours from New York, was the best one could make of it, the owner said. Of course, you could do the trip in a similar lapse by motor, but at that time of year, the middle of November, one might encounter bad roads and be delayed.

Darcy feared twelve hours was too long for the purpose he contemplated. And the seclusion of the Adirondacks seemed essential for another phase of his purpose.

He got in touch with a commercial airplane station, and tried to rent a plane. They had none for immediate delivery. He would have to put in an order and wait for a month or six weeks.

He wasted the rest of that afternoon—Thursday—going to the Government hangars, at Mitchell Field and on Governor's Island, to see if there was not some way in which he could secure a plane. But without avail.

On the island, however, he got a tip. "There's a guy in Bayonne, over in Jersey," confided one of the mechanics, "who has got a boat-bird he wants to sell. She's a two-decker, and flops up in a gale of wind; but she's a plane, and in straightaway, clear weather not too high up, you can get away with her."

This was after dark. Too late to go to Jersey that night. Fortunately, he still had Friday.

Bright and early Friday morning, Jennifer was in Bayonne. He found the airship—a bi-hydroaeroplane, rather battered, but apparently sea and air worthy. The owner showed him she could do sixty miles an hour easily, and even ninety or a hundred. Darcy had studied aviation during the war, and proved he could operate.

The price was eighteen hundred dollars. He bought it for fifteen hundred dollars cash, nearly half his remaining capital, and arranged for its delivery in a field north of White Plains Saturday morning at eight o'clock. He spent the early part of Friday taking finishing lessons in its operation from its former owner.

Returning to Manhattan in the afternoon he secured a pilot's license when he cited his experience as an aviator's apprentice in

the war. Then he sought a fellow he had employed on former occasions, sometimes a race-track tout, at others a rubber for prizefighters, Marty Bing.

"Now, listen, Marty," said he, slipping him a roll of bills, and a railway ticket to Westport. "You're leaving the Grand Central to-night, and you get off up there in the morning early. Get your breakfast and hire a flivver, or anything else you fancy, and beat it down the cement State road to a little town called New Russia. You'll make it in less than an hour. Get the local justice of the peace. Put him in your flivver, and beat it as fast as you can for the cabin."

Jennifer gave Marty a copy of the map loaned him by the owner of the leased cabin.

"When you get there," he went on, "walk right up and knock. If I don't answer right off, wait until I come out. I'll be there."

"Then, I suppose," Marty winked, "the dirty work begins. What is it, a murder or somethin'?"

"No murder!" Darcy assured him.

"That's a shame," Marty replied. "Nothin' I like better'n a murder, specially on Sunday mornin' in th' woods. Gives y' a good appetite f'r breakfas'."

"You'll have plenty enough appetite, and I promise you something to satisfy it, too."

Jennifer's final preparation was to hire another follower, one of Marty's pals, to ride up to Poughkeepsie the next morning, Saturday, and wait until he saw an airship sailing above the Hudson.

"That will be me," said Jennifer, "and to make sure, watch for me to drop a handkerchief. When you see the handkerchief drop, take this letter, open it, call up the number inside, and deliver the message, over the long distance phone, just as you see it written down there."

"Maybe I can't read it."

"It's typewritten."

Whereupon, he handed over a sealed envelope.

That night, Darcy rested securely, though he did not go home. He did not want to face his sister, Lenly. She might have too many questions. He regretted having taken her into his confidence about Imogen.

On the whole, however, he was quite gratified with his preparations. If Imogen kept her word and met him, as agreed, he did not see how anything could prevent his being able to "talk turkey" to Peter Killigrew on the following Wednesday.

CHAPTER XX.

FLYING AWAY.

DARCY spent Friday night in a road house on the Armonk road a little north of White Plains. He wanted to be on hand for the delivery of the plane. He had held out half the purchase price to insure a conscientious arrival.

The sky was dark, a few stars still out, and the sun not at all visible when he took his station in the field by the roadside which he had described. It was only five thirty. He wondered if he had not made a terrific mistake. How could an aviator make out this field—and in the dark—among so many?

As agreed, he turned on all the lights of his roadster, in which he had made the journey, and which it had been agreed the aviator was to pilot back to its garage at the Larches. Then he attached his searchlight to the sunshield and tilted it up, full force. Every five minutes, he described an arc with it across the whole heavens.

Three-quarters of an hour passed that way and he was numb with the cold, when a *put-put-put* along the road made him wary. It was a motor-cycle cop. When he reached the bars, Darcy had taken down in the near-by fence, he stopped and turned in.

"What's the idea?" demanded the uniformed man in leather puttees, as he dismounted and took in the traveling arc of the searchlight. "A message to Mars?"

"Not exactly," said Darcy, anxiously scanning the air toward the south where lay White Plains, and, beyond, the greater city.

"Signalin' Canada, is it, then?"

"Another guess, officer."

A luminous edge had appeared along the eastern horizon, first sign of the sun.

"Come, bucko! What's doin'? Don't tell me you're dotty!"

"Whoopee! Here! Here!" Darcy sud-

denly became frantic with enthusiasm. He waved his hat and yelled fiercely.

Following the direction of his yelling, the cop saw a dark mass with four bright eyes, winging a way from the southwest, lazily, like a huge billy goat with flapping paddle wheels.

"It's my bird-boat! See! Not so late!" Darcy yelled again.

The yelling evidently was not necessary, for the searchlight on the roof of the roadster was powerful enough. In a few minutes, the plane glided to a safe stop a hundred yards away, on the brown turf. A man in sheepskin and leather dismounted.

After looking at his watch he said: "Twenty-two minutes late. That's because I turned off the river at Yonkers—thought she was Tarrytown—fool mistake, for they don't look alike at night. But I counted the ferries 'stead of the lights. Didn't like to make that mistake, either, for I like to keep over the river long's I can. That's good advice to you, Mr. Jennifer. Keep over the river whenever you can—or any considerable body of water. That's where a hydroaeroplane has it on any other sky flyer."

Meanwhile Darcy was examining his new purchase with intense satisfaction. The twenty-two minutes made no difference. He had figured on more than that, for he was only ten miles from his trysting place and with three and a half hours yet to wait.

In a few minutes, the motor-cycle officer went his way. Darcy made sure again he could rise and light without mishap, and understood the particular tricks of the plane.

"I'm going to name her Honeymoon," he said.

"Queer name for a bird-boat," commented the man from Bayonne. "Nobody'd have time for a honeymoon aboard her; she's too fast and too tricky."

"That," Darcy replied, half to himself, "is just the idea, fast and tricky. My idea of a honeymoon."

"Well," said the man from Bayonne, "so long. Take care of yourself." He buttoned the second seven hundred and fifty dollars inside his inner vest, and went his way to the Larches in Darcy's roadster.

A few minutes before ten, Darcy landed in the field outside the far meadow of the Towers and near the grove of oaks. Scroggins had seen this. He had also seen and reported to Peter Killigrew the prompt appearance at ten of Imogen. He thought he had overheard what was said between them, but he missed much of it.

Especially the talk about marriage. Imogen had come with one purpose only, she thought—to tell Mr. Jennifer the facts about herself and thus be rid of him. She had no doubt that he would again ask her to marry him, and that would afford her her chance.

At the same time Nature could not ignore the fact that she was a girl just turned seventeen, and that this was her first suitor. No man before had ever made love to her, much less asked her to marry him. She might have been more short with Darcy Jennifer. She meant to be. But somehow—

When he said: "This is a beautiful day to get married"—casually almost, she immediately replied: "That's what I want to talk about."

"Fine. Then we are of the same mind! Couldn't be better! Come on!" He led her toward the field where lay the hydro-aeroplane.

To answer, she had to pass beyond a huge oak, where he had led the way. Thus she passed beyond the hearing of Scroggins. No other words they spoke actually reached his ears, though he could still see them plainly.

As she came to the other side of the oak, she saw the hydro-aeroplane lying on the brown turf. The heavy frost of the night before was melting in a strong sun. The engine of the machine was throbbing softly.

"My!" Imogen exclaimed. "Who left that here?"

"It's yours!"

"Mine!" She laughed queerly, with a twisted smile. Just for a moment, a brief second perhaps, she forgot the line of conversation about marriage.

Conversation about marriage is likely to be started by the man in the case, anyway. At least, Imogen felt that was the etiquette. However, perhaps no breach of etiquette

was required to take her mind from her determination just for the first moment of her surprise at seeing an airplane lying there in the field by the side of the road she had traveled so often—and hers!

An absurdity, of course, but requiring explanation.

"I brought it to you—as a present," Darcy went on, stepping to the side of the cockpit, where two steps of a tiny ladder extended down over the basket.

"But—but!" Imogen gasped. "What could I do with it? Why, I can't even run a motor car!"

"This is easier than a motor car. Step in. I'll show you!"

The surprise had been shrewdly prepared. It accomplished its purpose, though the girl still hesitated—for just a moment—trembled on the brink of her great adventure as a little fly reaching out its feet on the edge of a vast web might tremble and hesitate, unable to see or to imagine the spider at the far center.

"But—I'm—afraid." While she said she was afraid, neither her manner nor her voice indicated fear. Indeed, for the moment, curiosity and surprise had mastered her.

"Nonsense!" He reached forth his hand to her, from the side of the car. His smile seemed most engaging.

"But," she objected, while reaching forward to look at the curious little boats that lay a few inches from the ground, just above the sulky wheels with their pneumatic tires, "I thought you wanted to talk."

"Surely—after we've had a little ride—or during it!"

"My! I couldn't talk while I was riding in that!" she gasped.

"Very well, then, when we get back."

Of course, she knew perfectly well that once she had had her talk with him, she would never see him again, this strangely attractive young man in whose villainy it was hard to believe, having heard only so much of it as came from accidental overhearing from behind the partition of a dining room in a road house, this smiling young man who had been so respectful when inducting her into the mysteries of New York night clubs, this young man who planned such an

unbelievable surprise as this totally unexpected airplane set down here by exotic chance in this far meadow!

Moreover, she had never been in an airplane. What harm could there be that bright November morning, with the sun just beginning a healthy climb into the great blue skies above, in rising away with him—and then in telling him the truth, if need be?

A quick dropping of her eyelashes indicated that his preliminary battle was won. "You won't go toward New York?" she asked.

"No," he assured her, heartily, "in just the opposite direction. Come!"

She took his hand, and permitted him to assist her into the cockpit. After all, if she kept her promise to Aunt Maria not to go again to New York without permission, and her promise to herself to tell him the truth as soon as he asked her again, what harm could there be in this?

Indeed, what harm?

He had to give the plane a good shove and run along the ground with it for many yards, and try several times, pushing buttons and turning cranks, before the unwieldy thing did rise. But it did, and took them up with a rhythmic long swish, and before she could draw in a hasty little gasp there they were gliding along over the tops of the trees, and rising higher, and ever higher.

It was like a spectroscope, or going through a tunnel, or getting into "high" suddenly in the Deisel-Mascisti, but nicer than any of those. Strangely quieting, not fearful at all.

And there was the Towers down below, spread out like a drawing in a book, dull and huge on the brownish-green turf!

And the Lodge! A stately consort of the elder and more mighty parapets in the wider lawns beyond.

And the brick farm office, square and tiny, almost; and the granite garage, with its second story of plate-glass windows, all overgrown with ivy. She could see the roof where Carl's wife was hanging out the washing. She laughed. Aunt Maria did not know that.

And the meadow below—a team, with

two workmen, and another man, all looking up. Why, the other man was Uncle Isaiah!

She leaned over the basket and looked down toward him. He was waving his hands and shouting frantically. She tried to hear what he said, but the noise of the motor cut out every other sound.

She hoped he would recognize her. She took out her handkerchief and waved to him.

The men grew smaller. Presently they were the size of dogs. Still she waved her handkerchief, shouting greetings, hoping she would be heard.

Now they were very tiny—the size of rabbits. Still she waved.

Before long the men were no larger than bees, than flies, than distant ants crawling on a spear of grass.

"Uncle Isaiah!" she suddenly wailed. It seemed as if a terrifically poignant longing had come over her as she saw the last of him, and of the squat Lodge, now no bigger than a thimble on the far landscape.

She turned and grasped Darcy's arm. "Please—please," she demanded, "turn around and go back. I've gone far enough."

For a moment he said nothing. His face was tense and set straight ahead. Again she tugged at his arm, imploring him to return.

After a moment more of silence he replied, rather irrelevantly, "See that smoke over there! That's Poughkeepsie, I think."

"But I want to go back!"

"Yes. It's Poughkeepsie!"

"Please! Please!" She tugged at his arm. He seemed not to hear her. She looked at him closely for the first time since they had come into the basket together. Then she saw the leather head-dress pulled down over his ears. That was why he could not hear.

She leaned close to his ear and called, "Let's go back now!"

He nodded as if he heard, and answered, "Yes, it's the Hudson!" He pointed to the left ahead. "See! That's Kingston!"

She subsided, not sure that he hadn't heard, and not sure that he had. Anyway, she reflected, he had been respectful that night in New York at the Toasted Cheese.

And the Hudson was fascinating from above. Now she looked down and back on it—and ahead—a lazy, winding, ribbon of azure blue, with flecks of ice in the coves.

She smiled at the sheer momentum. He turned for the last time and looked at her, reassured by her smile. "Great—eh?" he said.

"Yes; but isn't it time to go back?"

He heard this—strangely—and replied, "Wait a bit."

They came directly over the river now, and seemed to rest above it, a bird whose wings reached from shore to shore. Of course, the plane wasn't that wide, but it seemed so.

What bigness, what power, what suspense. Imogen was buoyed with exultant feelings. Whatever fear she had left her! Her eyes dilated marvelously.

With an occasional sly glance Darcy noted her awakening to the sheer momentum of his dashing escapade. "Young Lochinvar," he said to himself, "out of the east!"

Poughkeepsie lay before them—smoky, big; a large, black, irregular patch on the brown fields.

At this point, he dropped a handkerchief. It trailed aft, fluttering slowly to earth. She did not see it.

Just beyond they came to the first patches of snow, below Kingston. Further beyond, in the fringes of the Catskills, the snow became heavier. They could see it lying in deep ravines in the mountains, but with the summits still bare.

She tugged again at his arm, and spoke close to his ear. "Listen!" she said.

"What is it?"

"When are we going back?"

"Why be in a hurry? We've got all day."

"They'll be worried about me."

"Didn't you see the message I dropped at Poughkeepsie?"

"What message?"

"An envelope, with a message to the Towers."

"No, I didn't see it. What did it say?"

"Not to worry. That you would be back later."

This was not entirely a lie. He had

dropped a handkerchief as they passed Poughkeepsie. Monty's pal, waiting for the signal, had seen, had opened the sealed envelope, reading inside: "Phone Farview, number 11, get the superintendent, or his wife, deliver this message: 'Safe away on a trip over Sunday. Back next week. Don't worry.—Imogen.'"

Monty's pal had followed instructions, so that when Scroggins returned from the city he had found fuel to fan his anxiety, which was not exactly the effect Darcy had desired. That message from Poughkeepsie he had planned to stop pursuit over the week-end, which was all the time required for the operation of his plan.

However, he did not know that Scroggins would be behind that hedge of Norway spruce, beyond the Lombardy poplars, just before he flew away with the Honeymoon express.

"Really?" Imogen was surprised, partially reassured, but puzzled. She wanted to ask more questions. She did ask several, but it was very difficult to talk in that machine, buzzing up there so queerly, part of the time in the clouds; at times, it seemed, in the tree tops. Mr. Jennifer evidently had difficulty with his hearing.

But not with his speech. Before long he was saying, "Look! I believe that is Albany—beyond! See the long bridge! It's the Albany bridge!"

The significance of the name, not anything she saw, gave her a sudden fright. "Why, Albany's nearly a hundred miles from the Towers!"

He looked at his wrist watch, calmly saying, "We've been up just one hour."

"Oh, my! Please let us go back now, Mr. Jennifer!"

"Hungry?" he asked, reaching under his seat and bringing out a paper of sandwiches, which he followed with a vacuum bottle containing hot coffee. "Here's a bit of lunch."

She resisted the food. "I can't eat unless you turn back," she said.

"Very well!" He turned the nose of the bird-boat to the left. It began describing a long, long circle, slowly, majestically, like a vagrant eagle. "We'll go back, but eat—this air makes one hungry!"

She ate a sandwich and drank some coffee. She watched them draw away from the river, and kept her gaze carefully on that landmark. She felt as if the Hudson was a guide, an anchor. She was no longer enjoying the ride. Something about it seemed sinister. The man beside her—this Mr. Jennifer—seemed to forbode evil. Yet she was determined to keep a stiff upper lip. All must still be well. The day was clear and sunny.

If they had come that far in an hour why not return in an hour. Perhaps her fears were groundless.

After a time she asked, "You are going back now, aren't you?"

"Sure."

"But the river is way off there. I can hardly see it any more."

"We are returning inland."

"But there is a big city. What is that?"

"Pittsfield, Massachusetts. We'll circle home that way." He lied glibly, for they were directly over Schenectady then.

As they passed Balston Spa he told her it was Lenox. "Ever been there?" he asked.

"No." She didn't add that she had been nowhere. But she knew that Lenox was nearer the Towers than Albany, and was reassured.

He was encouraged to lie some more. Over Saratoga he called out, "Sharon Springs." That was a hundred and fifty miles away, back to the east and the south, and almost that much nearer the Towers.

Then a body of water loomed ahead. As they came nearer it seemed bigger and bigger. "My!" cried Imogen. "Is that the ocean? How quickly we got there. You'll have to go inland more to reach the Towers, won't you? But what are those mountains around it? And it's not the ocean? Why, the land is on both sides. What is it?"

"Long Island Sound, I guess," said Jennifer.

They were passing above Lake George.

"Hope I'm not lost," he said casually. "I'll turn here. No need to worry yet, though. It's the shank of the day."

She had grown very pale. Something ominous seemed all about them. Was it the water below? He assured her that they were safer over water than over land, due

to the little boats on their shafts. It must be the mountains that oppressed her, those mountains rising on the left—rising, rising, higher and higher, with the taller and taller trees, and deeper and deeper ravines. Snow entirely covered them. They were not like the Catskills, with only the gullies white; here everything was white, beautiful, awe-inspiring—but disquieting.

Was he in truth lost? She saw how intent he was, peering down constantly, studying, guiding the wheel carefully. They came to another large body of water, and crossed its tip.

"What is that?" she asked timidly.

"Don't know." He knew it was Schroon Lake, but could think of nothing that looked plausibly like it in the southern part of the State.

Finally his eyes lit up. He had seen the gap through the mountains with the cement road lying there, like a silver tape, and, nestled in the pass near the summit, the settlement that spilled through a gorge—Elizabethtown.

He consulted a map pasted before him on the board, and turned left again. In a few minutes he gave a sharp exclamation.

"Gee!" he said. "I felt something crack. Hope it's not my radiator. We've been going pretty fast."

She was too frightened to speak.

"I'll have to alight," he announced, seeing a cleared space ahead, "and see what's the matter."

They slid safely into a long snow bank. Ahead of them was a rambling log cabin, the walks cleared, evidently inhabited.

Jennifer sighed with relief. So far his plan had worked admirably.

CHAPTER XXI.

THEY INSPECT THE CABIN.

HE helped her out of the cockpit. She collapsed on the lower step of the outer ladder. She drew up and away, fearful to antagonize him. Here they were lost in the wilderness. He seemed to be her sole hope of escaping. Moreover, what had he done as yet to alarm her?

Reason argued thus in her, but instinct rebelled. At last she was thoroughly awake to her danger. She could not define it, could not see it; she could only surmise it.

He saw the fright in her face. All color was gone. Her skin was pale as tallow; her eyes lustrous, dilated, but sunk deep in her head. Her teeth were clenched tight and her arms held rigidly to her sides.

Then she began to shiver and shake, trembling all over. He quickly took off his overcoat and threw it around her, and she did not protest, not daring to trust herself to open her mouth, fearful she would faint.

"It is cold," he said. "Sorry! Here, take a drink. You need it up here in the snow with only that thin coat."

She had on a light fall wrap with a narrow collar of fur, but thin stockings and low shoes. She looked at him steadily, still shivering; then managed to say quietly: "No, thank you."

He found the vacuum bottle. "There's a little coffee left. Drink that!"

She drained the coffee bottle, and felt better.

She managed to look around and take in their surroundings, an accomplishment impossible at first through her absorption in realizing that they were many, many miles from the Towers, and far up in the mountains.

Now that they were on the ground these mountains seemed so much bigger than when aloft in the plane. They went right up, up in all directions; ravine after ravine, crag on crag, climbing endlessly to far horizons.

She had never seen such mountains. All her life accustomed to the hills and dales of middle Westchester, with their gentle slopes and cultivated rondures, these stark cliffs and forest-clad slopes bore in on her terrifically.

They seemed to suggest something violent, something startling like this flashing change which had precipitated her there.

Now a noise made itself felt. A constant crashing, smashing noise, steadily ripping, roaring, tumbling, dashing, crackling! She looked in the direction whence it proceeded, and saw sparkling wisps of feathery water.

It was a stream, but what a stream, with force enough there in the snow to rip through any attempt at the formation of ice! The gentle brook flowing past the hairpin factory only sighed and gurgled. This was a wilderness stream, savage.

Her afflicted eyes sought the comfort of the cabin just ahead. That was the one relief in the terrific expanse.

There were curtains in the windows, dainty yellow curtains. Somehow she took courage at the sight of those curtains. They seemed to say that all was not lost—that there was still a way out—that perhaps this was only a nightmare, after all.

She rubbed her eyes. Was it a nightmare? No. There stood the log cabin, yellow curtains and all. Very small curtains, it appeared on second glance.

Meanwhile, Jennifer was examining the plane. He was down on his back, easing up under the engine. He came out, rueful-looking.

"Just as I feared," he said. "The radiator isn't working!"

Somehow she knew he was lying. But it hardly seemed wise to say so, little as she knew of engines and radiators.

She jumped to an earlier deception, now struggling in her memory along with the others.

"That couldn't have been Long Island Sound," she protested.

"No," he admitted, making a show of virtuous concession. "Must have been Lake George!"

She knew Lake George was nearly two hundred miles from the Towers. She looked at him in silent misery. What could she think but that he had done this deliberately?

He jumped to denial of her unspoken accusation.

"I thought we went the other way from Albany," he asserted boldly. "Really I did. Must have turned around without knowing it. I'm not used to driving a plane."

"These mountains, then," she said, "are the Adirondacks!" She knew her geography well enough for that.

"Must be," he admitted. "Rather stunning, eh—in the snow?"

She tried to make the best of it and smiled, asking: "Hadn't you better fix the radiator quickly so we can get back before dark?"

"Oh, I couldn't fix it," he blithely responded. "It'll take solder and a real mechanic."

She looked toward the cabin. "Maybe there's one in there," she suggested.

"Maybe. Let's see." He led the way.

No response came to his knock.

Meanwhile she stood in the path looking around. She noted wires leading from under the eaves and proceeding to the tops of near-by trees.

"Looks like a telephone," she suggested. "If you can only get in, you can call up somebody."

"Good! You wait here. I'll go to the back and see what I can do."

In a moment he was inside and had unlocked the front door, standing aside and bidding her enter, with quite an air—gayly.

She walked in cautiously and looked around. The cabin was furnished inside. Opposite the door was a huge stone fireplace, with logs laid and kindling wood, all ready for a match. Bookshelves packed with books stretched on either side. There was a long oak table and a number of comfortable rustic chairs. Portières concealed an entryway beyond, apparently leading to a kitchen. At the right were two doors—to bedrooms, possibly.

Then her heart suddenly leaped with joy. Just behind the door she saw a telephone, one of the wall-bracket variety, with a long-armed receiver.

"There's a telephone!" she exclaimed. "I thought there'd be one."

"Yes." He seemed to admit this grudgingly. It offered an unforeseen complication.

"Let me call the Towers first," she pleaded, jumping toward the wall, seizing the handle and turning it vigorously. To her fierce joy the bell rang.

Instantly the oppression of the mountains faded. She was back under the gentle protection of the ivy-colored portecochère of the Lodge.

"Then you can get some one to fix the

radiator," she smiled gratefully over her shoulder while waiting for the answer.

"All right," he assented, and went out-doors.

A wave of forgiveness toward him surged over her. His leaving her alone like that for her message home was so thoughtful, a simple reassurance of his respect and concern, and of his breeding. It flashed across her mind that perhaps she had suspected him unjustly. More than half her apprehensions had been worry about what Aunt Maria and Uncle Isaiah would say. And now in just a moment she would be able to speak to them, to tell them, to explain. Then she would not feel so far away—as if marooned in another world.

"Number, please?" came the voice from Central.

The blood surged to her face. She felt she was blushing furiously.

"Fairview 11," she called glibly. "Fairview 11—I mean in Westchester."

"Long distance?"

"Of course. Fairview 11. Oh, hurry, hurry—please!"

"Wait. I'll connect you with long distance. What is your number?"

"I don't know. Do you have to have my number?"

"Certainly. Wait a moment."

She waited, bland, content. But the wait was long. She called, "Hello, hello!" several times, but there was no further answer.

She rang the bell, at first easily, for it seemed strangely dead; and then furiously. No response. She looked up. There in the doorway stood Jennifer, watching her silently.

"What's the trouble?" he questioned casually. "Long distance hard to get?"

Again her face was as tallow. "This is funny," she said in a hollow voice. "They answered and then they stopped. Here—see if you can get them." She held out the receiver.

He rang and listened, rang and listened again and again. Finally he hung up and said: "Nothing doing. Disconnected for the winter, evidently."

"It's not disconnected—it wasn't a minute ago," she protested hotly.

"You may have overheard a neighbor on a party wire," he suggested.

She felt ready to cry. She passed out-doors and looked again at the wire leading to the tree. It was sagging now. She examined it more closely, and saw it nipped off close to the eaves of the cabin, just where it came from inside. She followed the loose end into the snow and picked it up. Freshly cut, no doubt about it.

She walked back into the cabin and closed the door and looked at him steadily, though his back was to her; for he was kneeling before the fireplace busily coaxing a blaze to start under the prepared logs.

A strange little chuckle rose inside from the depths of her consciousness. The sight of the cut wire seemed to refresh her, seemed to dispel all her haziness.

There could be no doubt about the situation now. He had deliberately trapped her. Then everything had been a lie from the very beginning—the promise to be gone ten minutes only, the assurance he would turn back home from Albany, the confusion of Lake George with Long Island Sound. Probably the radiator was not hurt any more than the telephone wire had been before he tampered with it.

Being sure of all this helped wonderfully. She began to feel more cheerful right away. After all, the situation had its novelty and its thrill. And let Mr. Jennifer beware. She would match her wits against his.

She remembered the curious delight with which she had related to Aunt Maria the episodes of her trip to the Toasted Cheese, and her final cry: "Now I am a woman of the world!"

This might be no idle boast when she got back this time.

The fire, which soon sparkled and roared, helped reassure her, as it soon filled the cabin with a glow, and there seemed no dearth of knotty pine and spruce sticks in the huge bin just outside the kitchen door.

Jennifer faced her cheerfully, and, now that she was sure of his deliberate deceptions, she found she could estimate him more coolly. She was almost ashamed of herself for not detesting him more roundly. He was so personable, so "nice."

"We had better try to find the road and get some help," she suggested.

He looked out. The sky was getting dull with twilight. His watch said four ten. In those ravines late in November the twilight set in at four in the afternoon and it was dark by four thirty.

"I'm afraid we'd get lost," he objected, "if we started this close to night. Hadn't we better wait here. Looks as if some one ought to turn up here before long. Cabin belongs to some one."

"We can't stay all night!" Imogen protested.

"Suppose we have to?"

"How can we?"

"How can we do anything else?"

"You ought to know. You ought to find a way out."

"I think it's marvelous luck to strike this cabin—just waiting for us, apparently. I'm not disposed to run away from it until morning and there's good daylight ahead of us," he said.

She had been looking at the two closed doors at the end of the big room. She stepped to the lower one, opened it, and entered.

It contained a single bed, bureau, chair, mirror, and a clothes closet. There was one small high window, but no door out.

She returned and went to the other room, the master's room, evidently, in the corner. It had two windows, a three-quarters bed, a dressing table, with a chest of drawers, a full-length mirror, a rocker, and straight chair. But, more important, an outer door leading to the porch; and with a key turned in its lock.

She tried the key. It worked. The door opened on the outside to the porch. She locked it again and slipped the key under a rug. Then she saw the door to the main room of the cabin also held a key. She tried it. Practical. Good.

She returned, and said: "Very well, Mr. Jennifer. I'll take this room," indicating the corner one. "I like it. You see, it's the best. And I'm such a little pig!"

At this her first sign of relenting, he came toward her impulsively, exclaiming: "You little angel!"

She held up her finger. "Beware!" she

said. "Or I'll fly away; and I won't take you, for you ought to fly and take me!"

"I will—in the morning. Don't worry. There'll be a village within a few miles, and it'll be easy to get a mechanic up then."

He began nosing around. He called her to see the china closet. It seemed to have all manner of dishes, enough for six or eight people, and glassware. They went together into the kitchen. There were plenty of utensils, pots, pans, a three-burner oil range, with the reservoir full of oil.

"Looks like an acetylene plant," he said, pointing to pipes overhead. By this time the gray dusk filled the cabin. He saw lamps in the wall brackets in the kitchen and living room, and a large central light in the living room. He lit them, and they burned in a waxlike white flame that easily cut out all the shadows. It seemed more illuminant than electricity, though maybe not so brilliant.

"Pretty soft, I'll say—what?" Darcy seemed in high spirits.

Imogen could not help feeling reassured. After all, it was quite an adventure—her first flight in an airplane, itself enough to constitute a high spot in experience, only to be so quickly followed by swift descent in the far Adirondacks; and then, instead of possible cold and exposure here in the snow, to find this marvelous cabin, well lit, finely heated—

Darcy was speaking. "Now, if there's only food, we'll be all set." He had discovered the icebox, but it was empty.

"Too bad," he asserted. "People must have shut down for the winter. See! The lower doors are open for ventilation."

"Yes," she admitted half-heartedly. She had been thinking that possibly the owners were only off somewhere in the woods for the day and would return toward night.

He did not give her time to dwell too long on this thought. "Let's look in the cellar," he suggested, disclosing a door beyond the kitchen in a tiny L.

She let him go ahead, for it was dark. In a moment, however, a soft glow spread up the stairs, and he called: "Come down!"

It's quite light. And such a find! We're in luck!"

She descended, pausing at each step. As soon as her head came below the beams of the floor she could see it was no ordinary cellar. It had no dark corners apparently. It was all neatly cemented and clean as possible, and stocked with many good things.

She stepped into the middle of the cellar with a little exclamation of delight; for she suddenly became conscious of her hunger. Her appetite quickened, and it was warm, very warm, in comparison with the ground floor above!

He saw the color come into her cheeks, so pale before. "You look a heap better," he commented. "I was scared at you when we first lit; you were white as a sheet."

He stepped in her way, and instantly she became very serious. After all they were in the cellar, and she suddenly realized he stood between her and the stairs. A vast fright consumed her. He seemed to understand, for he moved away from the stairs, leaving her exit clear.

She breathed more freely.

"Look!" he said, and pointed to a ham hanging from a rafter. Three sides of bacon hung beside it. A barrel of flour stood in the corner beyond, and a tub of sugar. There was a big bin of potatoes, and boxes filled with onions, rutabagas, turnips.

"What is this?" he asked, picking up from another box a few small, knobby red vegetables, looking like malformed and highly colored potatoes.

"Jerusalem artichokes," she asserted. "They're awfully good. Father used to raise them. Let's see." She bent over the box to be sure they were not mildewed. No. The cellar was dry and warm.

She rose and a soft creeping thing, like a furred rope, dropped over her neck. She screamed—a terrific yelp—and began pawing and struggling with the seeming engine of destruction.

He rushed to help her, and in a moment she saw what had happened. In coming up from the box of artichokes she had brushed into a string of dried peppers hanging from a rafter.

"What's the matter?" he laughed. "Think some one's trying to murder you?"

She burst into hysterical laughter, and then sank on the lower stair, sobbing violently. She clutched a handful of artichokes tightly to her bosom—just as she had the metal candy box that night in the Toasted Cheese.

CHAPTER XXII.

IMOGEN'S PERIL.

TACTFULLY Darcy turned his back and began examining the shelves.

These contained row after row of glasses, jars, and tins. After a moment, when he heard her sobbing grow less, he spoke aloud. "You ought to see what's here; canned peaches and pears and apricots; tomatoes in glass, and string beans, and peas; and I wonder what these are—look like tiny little carrots. I wonder!"

She heard him and became ashamed of her outbreak. She threw the artichokes back into their box, dabbed a handkerchief at her eyes, and came forward.

"I must be terribly nervous," she said. "I thought that was a snake!" Rather a glib evasion of the fact of her fear that this was where he had lured her. Now she realized how foolish she had been. She was eager to reinstate herself in his eyes—that she might go on fencing with him, and find out what he really intended.

"No snakes in winter," he stated.

"I can see that now," she wryly admitted, "but I didn't stop to reason when that string clutched me." She pointed to the peppers. "Look! It's red, and green, and white—like a snake, isn't it?"

He admitted that a man with the D.T.'s might be justified in thinking it a snake. "Or," he added, "a girl lost in the woods—a young girl."

She was eager now to show her bravery and spirit. "Well," she asked, "what shall it be for dinner?"

They argued the matter for minutes. They decided to get something that could be fixed easily and quickly. They found a tin of tuna, and took up with it glass jars filled with string beans, tomatoes, and what proved to be candied carrots, with a can of peaches for dessert.

It proved to be a rather complete dinner. They could find no coffee, but located a can of tea. Imogen even found a can of soup to begin with. Everything was piping hot in less than half an hour, for the oil stove worked to perfection. She mixed a batter of cakes with flour, tinned milk, and desiccated eggs. They found salt and pepper, and failed only when it came to butter.

After the meal she began to clear away the dishes. She had tried the water tap running into the sink, but no water came.

"Turned off," he said, "for the winter maybe."

"Never mind," Imogen replied. "I'll melt snow. It will be nice and soft."

"Resourceful—eh?" He tapped her under the chin.

She looked at him sharply. "Little minx!" he taunted.

He seemed to be a different man. No one could be more respectful, more tactful at times.

But now he stood there in the kitchen door, his arm on the jamb, blocking the way back to the living room, while she was fixing the gas flame under the bucket of snow he had brought in from the bank just outside.

"Say!" he persisted when she made no reply.

He came toward her.

She saw it would be impossible to get past him to the living room. There were two other doors in the kitchen, one to the L, leading to the cellar—an impasse!—the other leading outside.

She rushed outside, slamming the door behind her.

The night was pitch dark, no moon, a few stars, and quiet. The snow was banked up high around the rear porch. It had blown in from the steep slope which rose far into high timber right beyond.

Hearing him come from behind, frantic, her arms bare to the elbow where she had been getting ready to wash the dishes, she dashed into the snow bank. The snow was light, dry, and fluffy, and dashed over her, covering her as in a cloud of down.

She thought to fight a way through, and went on blindly, head first, thinking she was headed for the side of the cabin, and

so would get around to the front. Beyond that she had not thought. Anything to escape the man behind her.

However, she was going directly into the hill, and in a moment she was quite buried in the drift, and spluttering to get out.

She found herself in his arms. He was dragging her back into the kitchen. She was fighting with him, and he was trying to say something; she did not stop to distinguish what it was.

He got her inside, locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and thrust her into the living room. She spun over toward the fire, and stood there, shaking off the snow.

He came and reached out his hands to help her. She leaped at him in wild fury, and clawed for his face. In a second her nails had dug holes in both cheeks.

He threw his hands into the air, cried: "I surrender!" and dropped into a chair.

She brushed off the snow, and warmed her hands over the fire.

He put his hands to his cheeks and brought them down to examine them. "Blood!" he said. "You baby wild cat! Didn't know you had the spunk! Never mind, baby! Daddy 'll spank you by and by!"

He started to rise. She looked at him calmly.

"Forgive me!" he muttered.

She went to the kitchen and brewed some tea—very strong. And brought it in a thick cup. "Drink that!" she said, placing it before him.

Then she continued with the dishes in the kitchen.

She was busy for half an hour, looking in on him from time to time. He consumed the tea, then went out the front door. She followed to see what he was doing. He was washing his face in the snow.

When he came back his lashes were wet, and the front locks of his hair. There was a red furrow down one cheek and many scratches on the other. From the red furrow the blood was flowing rather freely. He put his hand up and saw it red. He went out and got a handful of snow, and kept it pressed against his cheek for some time.

Imogen said nothing and did not approach him.

"Little wild cat!" he muttered over and over. "Spunky as the devil!"

She accepted this as a soliloquy.

After a few minutes the action of the snow seemed to stop the flow of blood, but when he sat down again and came within range of the fire the tiny red drops oozed out once more.

"Severed my jugular vein, maybe," he sputtered. "Fine fix you'd be in if somebody 'd come along here and find me dead, and you have to go to the electric chair."

She found a newspaper and handed it to him. "Use the white part of that," she said. "Make a little ball of it, and swab your face with it. That will stop the flow of blood." She restrained an impulse to minister to his wounds personally.

"Thanks!" he murmured, and followed instructions. Then he leaned back and looked at her, one cheek plastered with a blob of paper, its curling edges crimsoned.

She kept the large table between them; and sat on a small chair near the fire, which she watched carefully, every once in awhile placing a fresh stick of wood on it.

Some time elapsed thus before he leaned forward. "Say, kitten," he began.

His eyes appeared less wild than they had been. And the blob of paper was drying, without any more blood oozing from beneath.

"Imogen!" he added.

"Well?"

"The tea cured me—or the snow—or maybe those clever little claws of yours. Ha! Ha! Clawed sensible! How's that?"

She regarded him calmly, without response.

"I apologize," he pleaded. "Come on! Be a sport! Be a good fellow! Forgive me! You got me wrong! I meant nothing! I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Why, you ought to know me by this time—after the Toasted Cheese and everything. You're just nervous—unstrung. I don't blame you—being lifted away from home like this. Lots of things to get on a girl's nerves—and you've got the proper spirit, too. Like to see it in you; but you've got Darcy Jennifer wrong. Won't you forgive me?"

She lowered her eyes. "Certainly," she replied, "I forgive you, and now I'll—" She started to rise to say she would retire, when he got to his feet.

He was still emphasizing his good intentions. "Why!" he exclaimed. "How could you think I'd take any advantage of you? Don't you know we're going to be married—soon's we can find a preacher?"

This gave her extreme satisfaction. It was the thing she had come out with him that morning to hear, so that she could have her chance to tell him—and they had come through all this journey and travail and danger and hardship for what she had expected to finish in ten minutes.

"I'm not going to marry you," she began.

"Guess again, Imogen."

"I am not going to marry you," she repeated. There was something else she had intended to say, something about him.

"Thought we understood each other about that," he continued.

"It's not me you want," she found her voice to assert. "It's money—I have seen through you from the start, Darcy Jennifer." This was it! She was on the track of her previously prepared dramatic speech.

He laughed loudly. His brain seemed quite clear, and she seemed so small and ridiculous over there, one side of her face lit by the firelight—her little oval face, so serious, so saucer-eyed, her reddish hair tantalizing. "A sweet little thing," he said to himself, "spunky and ignorant!"

He said aloud: "Money? You have money, Imogen? I am delighted to hear it. Money is always a good thing to have."

"It's not my money!" she cried. "It's Mr. Killigrew's money. I know. I heard you tell your sister, Lenly. In the road house that afternoon you invited me from the school. I'm ashamed of myself for letting you get me up here—and you lied about the radiator—and cut the telephone wire. Oh, what a liar you are!"

She leaned back wanly against the stone side of the fireplace. A large tear slowly trickled down her face, but she felt vastly relieved. She had it out of her system. Now she was not hiding anything any longer.

He started toward her and she went around the table, keeping it between them. "Don't touch me," she warned him, and brought out a little knife she had been hiding. It was one from the kitchen.

Again he laughed. "Put that away. I wouldn't harm you. I mean it. For I do intend to marry you, Imogen. Really!"

"Not when you find out I am not a ward of Mr. Killigrew's!"

To her own surprise she said it in a more direct, a more telling way than she had dared hope she might achieve. She flushed with satisfaction as she saw him start.

"What's that you say?"

"I am not Mr. Killigrew's ward."

"Nonsense! You are entered at Mrs. Morton's school that way."

"It's a mistake. Mr. Killigrew never—never—" She faltered, unable to say what she had intended. It seemed a reflection on Scroggins, toward whom now her whole heart and soul seemed leaning.

"No matter," Darcy went on. "You live at the Towers."

"At the Lodge," she corrected.

"The same thing."

"It's not the same thing. The Lodge is—" She intended to say that was the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Scroggins. Again she was prevented from expressing, by her own reflection that this might be a disloyalty to the old man who had befriended her, whose love she could not doubt, whom she loved like a foster father.

"Oh, well," he shrugged his shoulders, "what's the difference? I'm not marrying you because of where you live."

"But Mr. Killigrew hasn't anything to do with me. I'm not his ward, I tell you."

He put a hand over his mouth and looked at her intently. The depth of her feeling, her aroused anger had intensified her ethereal beauty. Her eyes glowed appealingly there beyond the lowered fire. He could see her quivering.

The strain of the days he had gone through, the long trip, the food he had had, their lonely cabin in the wilderness, urged him on. He was not going to cavil at a whim or two now, or take the word of a cornered girl.

He suddenly concluded she was far clever-

er than he had ever thought. "Might not make a bad wife," he reflected, "just as I told Lenly."

As proof of her cleverness she had thought of that lie about not being Killigrew's ward—to stop him. He chuckled deeply. What if she really knew his real situation, and the shadow of the penitentiary looming ahead of him for the coming Wednesday?

Time to tell her later.

Now there she stood alone, quivering, red and mauve in the firelight. He advanced toward her.

"Imogen!" he murmured softly, across the table which she circled, keeping just out of his reach. "You misjudged me cruelly. Whether or not you are Mr. Killigrew's ward makes not the slightest difference to me. I love you for yourself alone—you—just you—you adorable little bundle of sweet spice! Your claws only add to the wild flavor of you!"

He jumped the table and had her in his arms.

Then the knife came from behind her back, and she stabbed him. He felt the blade go into the fleshy part of his right arm.

He seized her hand, and twisted it. The knife clattered to the floor. At the same moment she slipped from his grasp. He bounded after her.

In a second—it seemed—she was beyond the door to the corner room. It slammed in his face, and he heard the key turn in the lock. He hurled himself against it, but it stood firmly. The cabin was well built.

He called again and again. He hammered on the door.

There was no response.

CHAPTER XXIII.

KEEPING EVERLASTINGLY GOING.

THE noon before, Scroggins discovered over the telephone what Darcy Jenner had spent the better part of one of his precious days to learn, that an airplane was not so easy to buy as an automobile, for instance, even when one was sinewed with the Killigrew name and money.

Outside of the government service none would be available inside of twenty-four hours. And this was not yet a case for the government, Peter decided, at least not the military branch.

Peter sent word to Carl to get out his line eight Pershing, a new racing roadster. "She'll do about as well on the ground as a plane can do in the air," he assured Scroggins.

About one o'clock they started north, Peter at the wheel. He seemed more alert, more alive than Scroggins had seen him for years.

"Hydro-aeroplane—eh?" Peter commented as they rode into Katonah. "Then he'll make straight for the river, and our job won't be so hard. He'll want to keep over water. I know those birds. Scouted on one during the war."

They crossed the Albany Post Road, and drove down to Garrison. Until then they had asked no one if a plane had been seen. Here they found a watch tower of the New York Central. The flagman looked from out his octagonal windowed viewpoint, and took his cob pipe from his mouth.

"Sure," he said in reply to the question. "I saw the feller—just before the ten fifty-two went down. Started to cross the river, then changed his mind and turned north, kept on right over the water. I saw his boats after he turned."

It was then five minutes of two, and a ferry would cross to West Point at two. "We'll wait and take it," said Peter, "for the road goes nearer the river on the other side, and we'll have to keep close to the water to find people who saw him."

"I believe we are better off in a road car than we would be in an airplane," Scroggins offered.

"I foresaw that while you were phoning for a plane," Peter replied. "On the ground you can ask people for the trail. Aloft you can only look down for your quarry, and it's almost like hunting a needle in a haystack. I don't think it will be hard to find him."

"Luckily, he's headed up the river and there are few planes in operation here this time of year. Now, if he had chosen the cross-country route, he would be in the path

of a great deal of regular plane travel—mail planes go by twice a day—and people would have paid little attention to him. Here, it's probably been months since a plane passed. Nearly every one will remember him and be glad to tell about it."

The ferry pulled out of its slip, and a moment later they were crossing the river to West Point.

"You seem a natural born sleuth," Scroggins suggested.

Peter smiled. "I'm a deputy sheriff of Westchester County, and don't you forget it," he replied. "I have to get something out of being a grand juror, and being drawn to White Plains every winter and paying a hundred dollars a plate for the annual dinner in town."

A few minutes later they were on the Storm King trail. Peter stepped on the gas. The Pershing line eight acted as if it wanted to be in Canada for tea. Before long, the needle pointed to 84. A motor-cycle cop trailed in after them, and they left him as if he had been standing still.

The needle pointed to 87. "She can hit ninety!" Peter asserted.

"Better slow up, Master Peter," Scroggins urged. The chassis was weaving as if in a terrific gale. "That cop will phone ahead and have us pinched."

Sure enough, three miles south of Newburgh, a phalanx of motor cycles appeared. They covered the road, and held up their hands in unison.

Peter put on the brakes, but they had to part to let him through, then wheeled and overtook him. The chief grunted: "Are you birds hijackers or just regular bootleggers?"

"We haven't time to stop," Scroggins began.

Peter was removing his goggles, and fumbling in his clothes.

"Never mind the fixing. Keep going until you come to the station. We'll pilot you. They phoned us about you from the foot of the trail; snapped your time, and we snapped it; you were doing around ninety. What do you think this is? A speed course?"

"No. But I—" Peter was having difficulty in locating something in his pocket.

"Save it for the judge, kid. And step along."

By this time, Peter had located the thing he wanted, a leather case. He reached it over the side of the car to the officer.

The chief looked at it. "Deputy sheriff of Westchester. What's that got to do with it?"

"I'm after a man—escaped, officer."

"Oh!" The three seemed suspicious.

The second examined the engraved pass more carefully. "See!" he said to the chief. "This is one of them millionaire passes—hundred-dollar dinner plate souvenirs. And look at the name this bird's put into it—Peter Killigrew. That's going some!"

The chief looked up, more suspicious than ever. "Peter Killigrew, eh?" he gruffly accused. "You've got a nerve to flash that on me."

"Don't you believe this is Mr. Killigrew?" Scroggins interfered, for Peter could not quite see the drift of the episode yet.

The chief grinned at his subordinates. "Step along, bo," he shouted, "and mind you keep her under thirty—straight to the station."

"But he is Mr. Killigrew!" Scroggins loudly proclaimed.

"And I suppose you're Piermore Bilton."

The superintendent rose in his full dignity and said: "I am Scroggins, Isaiah Scroggins, the superintendent of his estate in Far View, Westchester County."

The chief bowed low, mockingly.

"If you hold us any longer—" Scroggins was furious.

"On your way—on your way—and hold her to thirty—"

"But—" Scroggins spluttered.

"Aw! Tell it to the judge."

Twenty minutes later in the municipal court in Newburg, the magistrate received them. In three minutes they were released, with apologies to Mr. Killigrew.

Peter gave the chief a cigar, and a packet of cigarettes each to his two assistants.

"Now," he said, "if you want to make good, get down to the water front and locate some one who has seen a hydro-aeroplane going up the river earlier to-day."

The chief salaamed. "You bet your life,

Mr. Killigrew. And if there's anything else you want, just push my button."

Perhaps it was lucky for them they had been stopped in that manner, for the motorcycle chief got their news for them, and from twenty miles up the river, in a few minutes by phone, from his outlying stations.

Yes, the plane had been seen. Nearly all the watchmen noted it, and apparently two figures in it, going along easily at seventy to eighty miles an hour—nearly three hours before. They passed Kingston sure of their way.

Again at Saugerties, they found the trail warm, and at West Camp, and at Catskill. At Coxsackie, there was no one to be found who had seen the plane, but they pushed on and at Ravenna, only a few miles below Albany, they found a riverman who had seen the plane.

At Albany, a dozen people they asked remembered the big "bird," and they disquietingly agreed on the fact that it had turned left, leaving the river and sailing to the west.

"Making for Canada," said Scroggins, "it's nearer that way."

"It's about the same straight north, and there's water, too, that way, Lakes George and Champlain. Queer. I don't understand it."

Peter was puzzled for the moment.

Finally, he suggested they keep on the main highway to Schenectady, and make further inquiries there. If necessary, they could retrace their steps. "This fellow Jennifer," he soliloquized aloud, "was not an experienced aviator. He would want to keep near a main traveled road that he could see from above, in case of accident. So if he left the water he'll keep to the State highway."

This reasoning proved sound, for at Schenectady they picked up the trail again. A gasoline station man had seen the plane come up from the south, on a wide circle, and strike straight north along the line of the State road to Ballston Spa.

The Pershing pushed on. "Only an hour and a half of daylight left," said Peter. "I am afraid we will not get him to-night, unless he stopped long before this."

The trail was clear through Saratoga and Glens Falls and into the little town of Lake George, almost deserted now for the winter. Again they found a gasoline man who had seen the plane, headed still due north. They trailed it until it had left Lake George, and then they had to come back on their road to get the highway to Pottersville. At Schroon Lake again they got word of the plane.

By this time it was four o'clock and the dusk was beginning to fall. They pushed on, up along the creek bed, where a dozen bridges crossed and recrossed the winding stream.

Darkness found them in this ravine, with the rushing stream breaking through the snow that lined its banks. Twice they had passed through stretches of road where the snow threatened to hinder them, but the wide traction of the Pershing's balloon tires enabled them to make it.

The tires were practically new, but Peter several times lamented the fact he had come without chains. Now they came to a deserted stretch of road where the wind had a good sweep and where the snow had not been permitted to stay, but had been blown aside.

Instead, there was a long glassy stretch of ice. While rounding a corner on this stretch, going nearly fifty miles an hour, the roadster began to skid. The four brakes stopped the wheels but not the car. It collided with a fence and nearly toppled on into the bed of the stream.

"That's the end of speeding for this day," Peter announced, "until we reach a garage where we can get chains."

They had not seen a human being for twenty miles. A little later, about five o'clock, they passed the sign of a post office and stopped to read. "New Russia" it said, but there was no one visible. Boards were nailed over the windows and doors. Even the post office was closed for the winter. This was a summerland.

Something, however, a sixth sense perhaps, caused them to pause there at New Russia, and go from house to house looking for news. Not one house could they find occupied. There seemed nothing to do but push on until they found some one.

Later they were to know that if they had pushed up an almost buried road, from New Russia, they would have penetrated the clearing where lay the cabin sheltering Jennifer and Imogen—only eight miles away.

But it was after dark, and the road was not visible. They proceeded along the main highway.

An hour later they drove into Elizabethtown at a very sober pace, about thirty miles an hour. Scroggins bought chains at a garage, and Peter found accommodations at the Eagle House. Acting under his instructions, Scroggins signed the register "I. Scroggins and friend, New York."

It would have been a fine piece of news for Elizabethtown if the local paper had found out that Peter Killigrew spent the night in a two-dollar room like any drummer on his mountain rounds. But they never found it out.

Not more than fifteen minutes' ride away—by the plane or the Pershing, if the impassable mountains had been crossed by a good highway—Imogen had locked herself in the corner room of the cabin about the time Peter and Scroggins had made up their minds to retire for the night and wait for daylight to permit them to decide which way to go next.

Jennifer soon grew bold enough before long to arm himself with a chisel and hammer found in the cellar. With these tools he went outside on the porch and proceeded to try lifting the window to Imogen's room.

She could hear plainly what he was doing. Making sure that the window was fast, but still fearful he might break it any moment, she unlocked the door to the living room, took out the key, and then closed the outer door. A strong cross-bar slipped easily into place.

Quickly, she made sure that the kitchen door in the rear was safely locked.

Now she was safe in the warm cabin, with plenty of food and fuel and drink; and Jennifer was outside in the snow.

He soon made it plain, however, that this would not last. He hammered on the window pane until she was fearful it would be broken. She put out the light so he could not see in.

She could hear him shouting, and went close to the window.

"What is it?" she called out.

"Let me in or I'll smash the window!" he cried, tapping it smartly with his hammer.

She knew that with one blow he could come through. For a moment she contemplated running out the rear and into the night, and striving to make her way out through the drifts.

But she had done that once. It seemed certain suicide.

Where else could she go?

The other room! She had passed it up in the beginning because it had no second door. The window, she remembered, was high. She wondered if it was too high to be easily reached from outside.

He was pounding and pounding, threatening to crash the glass at any moment. She would have to think and act quickly, or he would be in on her through a broken window.

"Wait!" she called, "I'll let you in."

He stopped and went to the door.

She unbarred the door and then rushed to the smaller bedroom, hurled herself in, and locked it just in time to escape him. He hurled his shoulders against it vainly. She heard him curse.

She saw the light come on, through the keyhole.

A long silence. Then he knocked—gently—courteously. "Imogen!" he called.

She replied cautiously: "Well!"

"Sleep well, and don't worry, for I'm not worrying! You can't get out of that room except by this door. And when you do come out—make up your mind to meet your new husband! What's that you say?"

She made no reply.

"You say you can get out the window?" he called.

She had not said it, but she had been thinking it.

Another silence. Then she heard him outside the house, dragging heavy things. Then hammer and nails began working over the single window. She rushed to the sole opening of her chamber.

He was boarding her in, and nailing the boards on tightly. Again his voice sounded

outside her door, from the living room. "Aw, Imogen!" he pleaded. "Come on out—this is the only way!"

She offered no sound.

"You could make this a peach of a honeymoon!" he called.

She looked through the keyhole. She could see him sprawled in front of the fireplace.

After awhile he called again: "Aw! Imogen! Come and kiss a fellow good night!"

After that, his words became less and less distinct. The fire died down. She began to suffer from the cold, and took a comforter and a blanket from the bed.

Drawing a chair up so she could look through the keyhole from time to time, she wrapped herself in the blanket and the downy comforter, and soon felt cozy.

She began nodding. Then, every once in awhile, she would bite her lip to keep herself from sleeping.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AT THE END OF THE ROAD.

MARTY BING found the same condition at New Russia that Scroggins and Peter had found—a preference of the inhabitants for other climes toward the end of November. Post office closed, houses closed, hotels closed; he had to journey seven miles to find a store open.

It was a little crossroads country store, on the road to Keene Valley, a place for hunters and woodsmen to trade. Marty found it just after noon, in the flivver he had hired at Elizabethtown. He asked for the justice of the peace.

"Hain't no jestic 'round here," the storeman replied to his query, "but if hits a constable y' want, why I guess we kin fit y' out. 'S somebody got th' law onto ye?"

"No, I want the law on somebody."

"Take me, then. I'm th' constable."

"I want a justice of the peace."

The storekeeper glumly shook his head. "Y'll have to go to Keene Valley fer Jedge Dolliver. That's fourteen mile, only th' road's snowed in. Better take th' State road down t' Schroon Lake—twenty-six mile—an' mebbe Jedge Truex'll do. Only

come to think on it, Jedge Truex has went t' Albany t' th' legislature. Yer best tick-et's 'Lizabethtown."

"Just came from there."

"There's two on 'em there. Jedge Cook an' Jedge Vilas."

"That's about the same distance as Keene Valley."

"Six o' one; half dozen t'other."

Marty discussed it with his driver. There seemed no better way than to go back whence they had started in Elizabethtown.

While they were on the road, however, they located the trail, turning off into the hills just below New Russia, the trail clearly indicated on the map Jennifer had given Marty, a copy of the one he had obtained from the owner of the cabin.

They found the trail just before three o'clock in the afternoon, and started back, retracing their route up the gorge toward their starting point. Marty felt he was safely set now for his final play of the coming morning.

About an hour later, Jennifer flew over in the hydro-aeroplane. Three hours later, Peter and Scroggins thundered past the same spot in the Pershing, but it was quite dark then, and they could not have seen the trail, even if they had been looking for it.

Marty found Judge Cook in his office on High Street, Elizabethtown, and willing to make a deal for a little trip the following morning for what seemed a liberal fee.

The appointment was made to get away by eight o'clock.

The flivver had been hired from the principal garage in town, the one near the Eagle House. That night, there rolled in next to it a rakish, underslung, high-powered roadster, the type seen thereabouts in the summer time, but seldom in the winter.

It was Peter's Pershing, which spent the night touching fenders with the town flivver.

Imogen must have fallen asleep, though she could not tell how long she had been in the chair wrapped in the clothes taken from the bed, for when she looked through the keyhole again, she could not see any sign of life. The lamps were burning down

low, almost ready to go out. The fire was dead, only charred sticks and ashes in the fireplace.

The cold waked her. It was still pitch dark, might be evening, might be early morning, or any time between.

She wrapped herself again in the blanket and comforter, but she still felt cold. She did not dare lie down in the bed. She felt safer sitting up.

To keep awake, she tried all sorts of maneuvers to see through the keyhole, a difficult proceeding. Jennifer not being visible, she concluded that he had gone to bed in the other room. In that event, it would be safe to venture outside, especially as she had kept the key to the other room and could lock him in if he was there.

Slowly and softly she went about unlocking her door. She turned the key with hardly a sound, but as she opened the door it creaked. She stopped for minutes. Still no sign of life. He was doubtless sleeping soundly.

She opened the door with greater courage and stepped into the living room. A sound behind her startled her, as she jumped toward the outer door in a panic.

She looked back and there, right beside the door she had opened, he lay, on a couch, covered with clothes taken from the other bedroom. His mouth was open. It was a low snore she had heard.

From the floor near the fireplace she picked up the kitchen knife with which she had stabbed him. Holdly this tightly in her hand, she stood over him and watched his deep, disturbed breathing. She thought what a good brow he had, what a fine nose, what a loose mouth—and baggy pouches under his eyes—so young!

Pulling aside the tiny yellow curtains, she looked out. It was still night, but a late half moon was visible above the tree tops, lovely and clear. By its visibility, she could see the dark frame of the plane lying off in the clearing, on top of the snow, like a huge moth dropped on a white counterpane.

And their tracks leading to the cabin door. From the woods beyond, there seemed to proceed a cleared space, like a road. She felt encouraged. Once it was

really light, she would not hesitate to try to make her way along that road alone. There must be some one near a nice cabin like this, and so well stocked.

Then she went back and took another look at Jennifer, with his mouth open and breathing with an occasional low snore. He looked so weak—almost pitiful, she thought—and her fear began to go.

She examined the fire, shoving the ashes aside. Underneath were live coals. Out of the woodbox she chose a few splinters and began coaxing the fire to life—but silently, glancing every moment to the couch to see if he stirred, ready to run if necessary.

This time, she concluded, she would go straight for the road.

In fifteen or twenty minutes she had a good blaze going. She went to the kitchen and lit a fire from a burning splinter, which avoided the striking of a match. She placed on the fire a kettle of snow taken from outside the back door.

When she came back from this he was sitting on the edge of the couch, blinking, looking dully at her, and holding his head in his hands.

"Morning, Imogen," he moaned. "Oh, what a head!"

She stood at a safe distance near the door and asked, "Are you sick?"

"Awful! Better'n being dead, though."

He flopped back to the couch, and pulled the covers about him.

She piled more logs on the fire.

"Fire's great!" he commented. "Thanks! You're a game little sport. Awful glad you forgave me, but that's right. You took me wrong. I didn't mean you any harm."

Physical fear of him was rapidly passing, but she carefully concealed and secured the knife inside her bodice. She watched the kettle until the water began to simmer.

A little later she noticed a few streaks of gray light coming over the timbered slope beyond the kitchen door. Was it dawn?

"What time is it?" she called in to him.

He looked at his wrist watch, replying, "Twenty minutes to seven." And then he held his head again, moaning, "I'd give a right leg for a cup of hot coffee!"

She was rummaging through the kitchen cabinet, where she had found a bag of oat-

meal. She prepared some of this in a skillet, and placed it to cook. Then she further examined the cabinet. It had several little patented devices, and curious reversible drawers.

Pressing on one of these springs out popped a coffee grinder. Just below was a covered box. Opening it she found several cupfuls of roasted coffee beans. She put them in the grinder and turned the crank. Presently the aroma spread through the cabin. She found a coffee pot and filled it.

"Am I looney, or is that coffee?" cried Jennifer, rising from his couch and crossing weakly to the door of the kitchen. She turned to see him standing there, swaying against the jamb, where he leaned for support.

"Yes. It's coffee!"

She had no fear of him now. Daylight was at hand. And the way to the road was clear. Before long they would be out of this.

"You're a brick," he mumbled; "dead game little sport. I'm going to treat you square for this."

"At last?" she asked.

"Look here! What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"You aren't holding it against me for last night, are you, Imogen?"

She looked down and away, as if shaking her head.

She went on with the breakfast preparation, while he carried in some wood from the shed outside to the woodbox by the fireplace.

She served the peaches left from the can opened the night before in two saucers placed on the table in the living room. He ate his without waiting for her, and apologized. "My head is splitting. You don't mind if I don't wait, eh?"

"Eat!" she commanded.

Then she placed the oatmeal before him. He devoured a portion. "Come along," he insisted. "Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes," she admitted, taking her peaches to the kitchen, where she was browning some cakes left from the night before.

"When'll that coffee be ready?" he demanded, standing behind her.

"In two minutes."

"I can't wait. Head's better already, though."

"You want it strong, don't you?"

"Sure!" he admitted.

While she stood over the coffee he said, from the doorway, "Say, Imogen, this is the best thing ever happened to me—getting to know you like this—makes me think you're the real thing to be Mrs. Darcy Jennifer."

She looked blackly at him, but her eyes stopped on the upper part of his right sleeve. "What's that on your coat?" she asked.

He looked. "That!" He pulled the sleeve and it stuck. He winced. "Must be where you plugged me with that knife."

"Oh! Let me see!" She went to him, and helped him remove his coat and roll up his sleeve. The knife had entered the flesh. Blood had oozed out, but was dried. She got a basin and filled it with warm water, then stepped inside the L and tore a piece from her petticoat.

Leading him back to the living room, now quite light from the sun's rays, which began to struggle in through the yellow curtains, she bathed and bandaged his wound.

As she finished, but without touching her with his hands, he bent swiftly down and implanted a kiss on the back of her hand. She affected not to notice this, saying only, "I hope there's no infection now."

She served the coffee and the cakes. After he had ravenously eaten three-quarters of the supply he appeared to have entirely regained his spirits. Even his loose mouth seemed strong again.

She started to take out the dishes.

"Don't bother about that," he protested. "I'm going out and see if I can't fix that radiator myself. If not we'll walk down that road until we come to a garage or a parson."

She paid no attention to the remark, but went on with the dishes. "Great day for a wedding," he added. "Sunday, too!"

Still she made no reply.

It seemed useless to repeat what she had said to him the night before. She had already said what she intended to say—if not in just the dramatic form she had imagined.

It wouldn't do, however, to give him any

inch of further assurance. She was not out of the woods yet.

So she replied, "You don't know much about the Morton school, do you?"

"Very strict with the girls."

She turned her back to avoid his seeing her blushes.

"Ha! Ha!" He took it as a joke, and went out to his plane, though, in reality, he wanted to look for Marty Bing. He located the road. Then, to kill time against the arrival of his confederate, he melted several gallons of water in an old boiler.

He started the engine and was relieved to hear it purr again. They could travel whenever they liked now. He turned from the plane to see her standing on the porch.

"What do you think!" he said blandly, rejoining her. "The radiator's in shape again." He smiled ingratiatingly.

"Then we could have gone back home last night?"

"Only I lost the way. It's daylight now. We can inquire, soon's we get out where there are people. Come, let's get warm."

He led the way back into the cabin. His watch had just told him it was a few minutes to nine. Where was Marty Bing?

A voice from the woods answered his thought. "Hello!" A long call.

Both rushed to the door. A flivver was grinding through six inches of snow.

"Help at last! Well, isn't this great!" Jennifer was all smiles. He rushed forward to meet two men who presently dismounted in the clearing. In a moment he was back, leading them—one a rat-faced city type, the other a rotund, amiable man in a great coonskin coat.

"Miss Nelson," he called to Imogen, as she stood before the fire, "here are the Heaven sent helpers of two young fools. Let me introduce Mr. Bing of New York, and Judge Cook of Elizabethtown. Judge, Miss Imogen Nelson of Westchester County. Mr. Bing, Miss Nelson. Well, well! What a jolly party. How about a little coffee, gentlemen? Imogen, is there any more coffee?"

"No," she blithely consented, "but I can make some."

In a few minutes there was steaming hot coffee for the newcomers.

While they drank Jennifer said to her, so all could hear: "Isn't it a piece of luck the judge here is a regular justice of the peace? Saves us a search."

Imogen started guiltily. She had felt so secure in the presence of the strangers, and now suddenly her edifice of confidence began to crumble.

"How?" she asked dully.

"Why, the judge can marry us."

She looked to the judge. He was beaming expansively. The coffee had been very good, and the sharp November air bracing indeed.

"Quite the ticket for me, folks. I'm just as good as a parson—and quick to oblige. I like to encourage sentiment whenever I see it. Nothing more romantic than a marriage in the woods!" He looked from one to the other in the essence of good nature.

Imogen felt her body grow like steel, and her brain began to work deftly. "I'd like to ask you a question first, judge?" she began, very softly, with the properly demure hesitance of a bride.

"Sure, ma'am. Many as you like. Shoot. We got the full day."

She drew in her breath as she inquired, most innocently, surveying the three from her saucerlike eyes, above which her reddish hair was brushed negligently:

"When you marry any one, do both parties have to consent?"

The judge slapped his knee and roared with laughter.

"It's one of the essentials provided by the statutes," he exclaimed. "Fair enough, too, I always say."

Jennifer winked at him. "She means she's not sure about my consent, judge, but that's all right. I guess we understand each other."

He grinned at Imogen and stood beside her, though not venturing to touch her. He did not believe she would dare rebel.

"Come on, judge," he insisted. "Say the word, and get it over with."

The judge rose slowly as became a man of dignity and poise, not to say avoirdupois. As he reached his feet he was astounded to hear Imogen say coldly, definitely, decisively:

"Then you can't have any wedding, for I refuse to give my consent."

Jennifer looked at Imogen forbiddingly, and then motioned to the judge and Marty to go outside.

"Little lovers' quarrel," he explained. "I'll call you in a minute."

The two went out. Jennifer turned on her explosively. "He really is a justice of the peace, Imogen!" he cried. "I told you I'd make good—and I will. And we must be married now before we go back. And I love you!"

He went toward her, hands outstretched. She turned and fled into the smaller bedroom and locked the door in his face. He joined the judge on the porch.

"A little fool," he hotly asserted. "I'm going to protect her against herself. Judge, I'm going in there and hold her, and you come in and read the ceremony."

"You mean without her voluntary consent?"

"Sure. It's only a lovers' quarrel, I tell you. She wants to marry me. Didn't she come up here with me last night? Well, you know what that means. I'm not going to let her outrage herself in this way."

The judge was troubled; he shook his head.

"Too bad," he said, "but you'll have to do your own lovemaking. That's not my business."

"But you can perform the ceremony. Here!" Darcy produced a roll of bills and peeled off one with a big numeral.

The judge waved it aside. "Fifty dollars is enough for a proper ceremony. I've married many for less. But against the girl's consent—no, sir-ee!"

"Here's two hundred!"

"Never!"

"Five hundred!"

"Not for a million!"

The rotund man, scowling now, began waddling back toward his flivver, his coonskin brushing the snow indignantly.

"Wait!" yelled Darcy. "I'll get her consent."

At that moment, and before anything further could be done, a steadily increasing rhythmic swish through the woods became audible.

Marty Bing was the first to see what it meant.

"Some one coming, boss!" he called. "A sporty roadster—two men!"

The roadster, however, was not having the easy time of it the flivver had enjoyed. The road was not wide enough for such a wide chassis. Again and again saplings had brushed the sides of the car as it went on, at a very stiff pace, too, for that rough wilderness. Now it was brought to a standstill while still a few hundred yards from the clearing. Its front fender was caught in a two-inch tree, which held it against all persuasion of the benevolent old gentleman who seemed to be the passenger, while the driver sat and fumed at him to hasten in prying it loose.

Taking a good look, Darcy Jennifer recognized the driver.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed under his breath to Marty Bing. "It's Peter Killigrew. Good night!"

He ran for the plane, calling to Marty. As he climbed into the cockpit he said to Marty: "Get back to New York, see my father, and get him to fix me up before next Wednesday. And tell him I'm in Montreal. I'm taking no chances on being nabbed."

Marty helped him run the plane off the ground. A moment later the big boat-bird lifted away above the trees, skimming the edges of the clearing, and headed north.

About the same time Scroggins pried the Pershing loose. Peter, looking up, saw the plane get away, and noted Jennifer was alone in her.

"He left the girl behind," Peter said to the superintendent. "You look for her. I'll keep after the crook!"

And he turned the roadster and was off back along the trail.

Imogen came out of the room at the sound of Scroggins's voice. They embraced silently with intense feeling. Marty and the judge took them to Elizabethtown in the flivver. There they hired a car to take them to the railroad station at Westport. They took the night train for New York, and reached the Lodge the next morning. Master Peter drove into the plaza at the

Towers that afternoon. Scroggins sought him at once.

"The plane came down at South Plattsburg," he said. "Ran out of gas. Jennifer swears he did not harm the girl."

"I don't believe he did."

"Good!" said Peter. "Then I'll keep my word with him. I agreed if it proved the girl was O. K. he could have until the end of the week to settle. He's gone to Cleveland to see his father."

That seemed to close the interview. Scroggins waited for Peter to ask something more about Imogen, for it seemed that at last he was about to accomplish his long nurtured object of making his employer acquainted with his "angelic child." He had always believed that if Peter would only see her, her destiny would be settled—and most favorably.

"Shall I call her up to see you?" he suggested.

The master of millions scowled. The flavor of the adventure, which he had seemed to enjoy while they were having it, had passed, evidently. The glow in his eye had faded. The stoop came back into his shoulders, wrinkles into his forehead.

The weight of responsibilities seemed upon him again; the caution required to steel himself against all sorts of adventurers, male and female, came into his voice.

"I never want to see her!" he replied levelly. His voice was very hard.

Scroggins felt as if he had been struck.

"Women mean nothing but trouble," Peter went on listlessly. "I didn't go up there to rescue your girl, but to land a crook."

Scroggins smiled at this, for Peter had landed the crook only to let him go—and with more rope. But he said nothing. He had learned it was wiser to wait a more propitious occasion when the wind of disfavor was not blowing so strong.

Peter evidently wanted to emphasize his unnecessary affront. "A little outcast like that is bound to stir up mischief," he persisted. "Tell her she will have to marry the next scoundrel who tries to get her. I wash my hands of her and of all her escapades!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



The Man from Laramie

By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

"I asked the bartender, won't you charge a gin phizzzzz;
Says he, we don't do nothing but a strictly cash bizzzzz."

CONSTABLE BILL GRAY of the Northwest Mounted Police, jogging over his patrol route at an easy canter, was trying mighty hard to chase away the blue hobgoblins and bitter disappointment which had hounded him for the last three weeks.

By singing, whistling and holding long, lop-sided conversations with his horse, he was endeavoring to get in step with the laughing April and the first flush of spring on the Alberta prairie.

The warm chinooks from Oregon had blown for three days now. Underfoot, the snow had melted down to a couple of inches of lead-colored slush. The *kul-lop kul-loppity-lop* of the horse's hoofs squashed mud and slush in a dozen directions—including upward, splattering the constable.

Little streams trickled everywhere down the undulating prairie slopes, forming miniature freshets in the gullies and knee-deep lakes in the muskeg flats.

Several times on that morning's patrol,

Gray had crossed the trail of Piegan and Blood parties out hunting the few lingering bands of buffalo that had wintered in the wooded hills along the border or had pushed up from the Montana bad lands. The tracks of their small-footed *shaganappi* cayuses were unmistakable to his practiced eye. And once that morning, he had come across a band of emigrants, eleven tented wagons and Red River carts, trekking across the buffalo plains to the Alberta foothills, their homesteading goal.

But he was not interested in Indians so long as they behaved themselves, or in emigrants so long as they could take care of themselves. He was on the lookout solely for Dread Miner and his henchmen, Breed Dunn and "Dook" Sazen.

For three weeks, Gray had been combing the border country almost day and night—for all the good it had done him. The murderer and his two confederates either had vanished, or were lying low as weasels in some hideout.

Had he known that they were even then *hunting him*, ambushing the trails, riding the country at night for a glimpse of his lonely camp fire, missing him again and

again by some miracle of a kindly Providence, he would have gone more cautiously and fearfully about his patrolling.

II.

It was noon and Gray was hungry. Two miles ahead of him flowed a small stream belted with cottonwoods. He meant to stop there and cook a bite. To his left—south—reared a little watershed and over that lay a valley.

When he saw a flock of geese light in the upper end of the draw just over the ridge, he swore to have California-fattened goose for dinner. He had been unlucky with antelope for the last week, and "Chicago chicken"—bacon—was getting old with him.

He dismounted, tossed the reins over the horse's head, drew his carbine from the saddle bucket, and stalked cautiously up toward the brow of the hill. Before he got there, the geese suddenly flushed with a fanfare of alarm, and breasted up out of range before swerving over him.

Curious to know what had scared them, he strode on to the top of the watershed.

About a mile below him, in the valley, he saw ten men—white men. Leading their horses, they were walking up the valley toward a knot of four dead cottonwoods, the only timber along that stream.

Gray's curiosity was kindled. Ten men were more than he usually saw in a month's time. What were they doing there together? Why were they *walking* through the slush? What was the main idea of it all?

He whistled softly to his horse. It trotted toward him. He secured his binoculars and pointed them at the party.

As he caught the men and drew them close to him, his face paled suddenly. He swore an unconscious oath.

By their Stetsons and chaps he knew they were a party of ranchers and cowboys. Three men walked in front of the others.

The middle one of the three had a rope around his neck; his hands were tied behind him; and the two led him along at a brisk, measured pace—toward the dead, fire-blackened cottonwoods.

The death march had less than a hundred

yards to go. Five minutes at most—and maybe less.

For a single moment Gray stood looking at them; then leaped into his saddle like a shot—stowed the carbine in saddle bucket, and spurred his horse.

Keeping out of sight over the rim of the valley, he spurred his horse to a dead run. In spite of ice and mud and water underhoof, the noble mount kept its footing and took him down across the prairie at a furious pace.

He could see the tops of the cottonwoods above the rim of the valley. When he was nearly even, he cut in toward them, reined his horse to a trot, and reached the brow of the slope seventy-five yards from the party.

He was not a fraction of a second too soon.

The doomed man stood under the biggest of the four trees. The noose had been adjusted around his neck and slipped tight. The rope had been flung over a stout horizontal limb twenty feet above the ground, and the other end was tied to the saddle of a horse. The nine men stood in a silent circle close about him.

He was meeting his doom courageously and self-possessed. From his pockets, he was emptying a few trinkets and personal things and handing them to a stalwart young rancher. To his last low-spoken requests whatever they were, the rancher nodded his solemn promise.

Of the whole party, Gray knew only one man, the young rancher. He was Charley Davis, a Montana cattle and horse raiser, just across the border. Gray guessed the others were Americans, too, else he would have known some of them.

He spurred his mount forward. The horse half slid, half galloped down the slope, jumped the little miry branch, and stopped beneath the trees, before the astonished party could recover from their surprise and finish their job.

Gray dismounted.

"Well, boys," said he, with a cool grin, "I see you're having a little neck-tie sociable."

"Uh-huh!" Charley Davis snapped in answer. "How did you guess it, Gray?"

"Wasn't hard," the constable returned affably. "A rope, a limb and a man make a sociable just like two and two make four."

He was stalling for time, to get his brain working and to feel out the temper of the party. That temper was all too plain. It daunted him.

They were not going to tolerate any interference. They were not going to argue.

He stood wide-legged facing them, looking from one to the other. He knew what caliber of men they were. If he had threatened them or made a blustering display with his belt gun, he would have pulled instant destruction down upon the man.

The cowboy to whose saddle the rope was tied took hold of his horse's bridle.

"Hold on there, you!" Gray ordered him sharply.

"Hold on the devil!" the man whipped back. "You and hell and high water can't stop us from stringing this duck up where he and his kind belong."

"Why, what's he done?" Gray asked, to gain another second.

They ignored his question.

"Thing for you to do, Gray," Charley Davis advised him tartly, "is to get back over that hill pronto. You're not supposed to see this, I know. So get where you can't. What you don't see won't hurt you."

"I'll be cussed if I budge an inch before you tell me what you are killing this man for."

"He's a horse runner."

"How do you know?"

"Caught him riding a stolen bronc. My bronc. It was rustled by his pack just before they came north on an expedition about a month ago. He's one of the gang we've been after—the gang that called Jude Carson out of his corral last summer and shot him. We're going to make an example of this'n."

"Did this man confess?"

Davis laughed sarcastically. "Oh, sure, Gray! They all confess, don't they? We didn't ask him to. *He was riding his confession.*"

"But, see here. You don't know absolutely that you've got one of the gang. If he's an innocent man—"

Gray stopped. He saw he had made a bad mistake. His doubt antagonized them.

"Stand off!" one of the men ordered, trying to jostle him away from the doomed man. "We've jawed long enough. Hadley, snap out that horse—"

Gray twisted his hand into the rope above the noose.

"Davis," he spoke sharply, aware that a man's life hung upon his next words, "I've done you three good turns in the last two years. If you've got any decency in your make-up, you'll give me a chance to speak."

Davis fidgeted uneasily.

"What have you got to say? Make it short."

"All right. You say this man is a rustler. I believe your evidence. Don't mistake that. I don't blame you fellows a cussed bit for what you're doing. Don't mistake that either. You're giving him what the whole gang deserves."

It was a shrewd word. It wiped out the antagonism which his doubt had raised. It made them feel he was on their side.

"Now answer one question, Davis. What are you lynching this man for?"

Davis banged his fist into his palm.

"To wipe out this rustling, root and branch: that's what for!"

"That's what I thought. I didn't suppose you fellows were riding the country stringing people up for the fun of it. But you're cutting your own throats if you lynch this man. Let me put up my argument. You can take it or leave it."

He pointed down to the valley to a little mound a bow shot away.

"You see that? It's the line. You're a hundred yards up on Canadian soil—"

"There's no Johnny Canuck a hopping that can stop us if we are," one of the men flared up.

"You hobble that kind of lip," Davis told him. "Don't go ringing in nationalities. They don't pay. Gray's a good chap. He's put in more hard licks against these horse runners than any two of us have. He's doing his sworn duty now in trying to interfere. That's why I tell him to get up over that hill, and hurry up."

"Before I let go this rope," Gray as-

serted doggedly, "I'll finish what I started to say. You're on Canadian soil. I've seen this affair. I've got to report it. It sure as hell will cause friction if you fellows lynch a man on our territory even if you did catch him below the border. So far we've all worked together. But if we ever get to bucking each other back and forth across the line, it will be sleigh bells for this border gang. You exposed ranchers will pay the fiddler in the long run.

"You see what I'm driving at. I'm with you fist and mitten in wiping out the gang. But if you think that stringing up one man is going to stop the rustling, you're just nine hot-headed fools. This particular gang is scattered along this border for three hundred miles. You know that's a fact. I know it. Answer me this: how are you going to wipe out this horse running, root and branch, as you say?"

"We'll round up a part of 'em and ride the others clear out of the country," Davis answered. "We're dead set on one thing: we're going to get this gang if we have to drape a rustler on every tree along the border."

"Wait a minute. How are you going to locate 'em, round 'em up, or get the drop on 'em?"

"You tell us, and we'll tell you."

"All right," Gray whipped back. "I'll tell you how. It's simple. Lift the noose off this man here and let me take him in to the post."

"I don't quite follow your figuring," Davis said dryly.

"I figure it this way: we've been after this gang for three years. We never yet have got any inside stuff about them. Now here stands your chance, with a noose around his neck. You say, string this man up high; I say, give him to me and *I'll make him talk!*

"I don't give a whisky darn. He ain't any brother of mine, I guess; and it ain't my cattle and my broncs that are at stake. It's all your lookout. Think it over. Then go ahead with your sociable—if you still want to."

He untwisted his hand from the noose and walked a dozen steps away. He had shot his wad; it was up to the men. Bet-

ter let them talk it out between them, by themselves.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw them bunch up around Charley Davis. The debate was brief and hot. Presently Davis called him back.

"What you said sounded like sense to us, Gray," the rancher said slowly. "We're going to turn this man over to you so's you can make him talk."

In honest gratitude Gray held out his hand. One by one the men shook with him.

"Now just one other thing," Davis added solemnly. "You've got a hard fifty-mile trip. Don't take any chances with this duck. You might meet up with some of his partners. You never can tell what will happen. If you can't take him in alive, you owe it to us to take him in dead. If you let him get away—"

"I know how you feel about it, Davis," Gray interrupted. "If I let him get away after you fellows treat me white like this, I'd come back and take his place under this tree!"

III.

A QUARTER mile up the valley from the cottonwoods, Gray took a first square look at his prisoner. Until then he had been too busy saving the man's life to notice anything about him.

He was Gray's own age—twenty-seven; a medium tall, well built young fellow; brown haired, brown eyed, and dressed in ordinary corduroy trousers, leather jacket, black Stetson and high heeled "Cheyennes." In short he seemed just an ordinary young rancher.

He did not look like a rustler, but Gray had dealt with enough of the gentry to know that looks were a mighty poor thing to bank judgment on.

The prisoner was still riding the horse which belonged to Charley Davis's remuda. The Wiggly-N brand was plain as if just laid on.

He noticed Gray looking at him.

"I don't know how to say it, partner, but these four words mean a lot—you *saved my life*. When you come tearing down that slope, I honestly was sorry to see you come. I wanted to get it over with. I didn't

have one hope in a million you could turn the trick. You can surely handle men."

"Forget it," Gray cut him short. "I'd rather hear how you happened to be riding this Wiggly-N horse."

"I was heading north, about ten miles below the line. My animal gave down on me. This bronc was pasturing in a draw, miles from anywhere. I took him because I had to. Just below the line, these cowmen rode out of a coulee and stuck me up. I told them how I'd got the bronc, but they wouldn't listen."

"I don't blame 'em," Gray commented with a short laugh. "That explanation sounds pretty flimsy even to me. What's your name?"

"Hastings. Dick Hastings."

"Where are you heading for?"

"The Double-Bend Settlement."

"Where's that?" Gray asked his prisoner innocently.

As a matter of fact, the tiny settlement was less than a mile from the police post. For certain good reasons Gray went in there every time he could snatch an hour's leave. He knew every soul in the place.

"It's about fifty miles north and a little east."

"What's your business? What are you doing in these parts?"

"I was going to visit my sister. Then I meant to look around for a ranch location if I liked the country. I've got a ranch down at Laramie, but it's too high up for anything but baa-baa's."

"You were going to visit your sister, you say?"

"Yes, she's running the government school at Double-Bend. For the *meti* girls there."

Gray's left eyebrow arched.

"I don't believe I happen to know a Miss Hastings at Double-Bend. I know all the white women there and she ain't either one of them."

The prisoner looked at him sharply. "You was lying about not knowing the settlement."

"Mebbe. A good acquaintance of mine, Miss Ruth Welliston, runs that school. Guess again."

"She's my sister—my half sister—"

"Oh, hobble it!" Gray snapped. "You lie faster'n I can talk. If Miss Welliston had a brother, she'd have told me about him."

Hastings flushed under his bronze. He was silent for a couple of minutes.

"Mebbe she would. And mebbe not. You can't tell what they'll do. I used to be pretty wild. She don't know I've done the about-face; mebbe that's why she didn't want to mention me to you. But you must be this man Gray she was all the time writing about."

"You heard my name back there under the cottonwoods," Gray remarked dryly. "It 'll take a better one than that to make me untie your hands—if that's your game."

A little later the prisoner tried again.

"She must have fibbed to me about her beau. She said you were a sergeant."

"I was," Gray answered. "There's the chevron threads still in my jacket sleeve. I got busted when my patrol failed to follow you horse runners through that blizzard last month. I knowed it would be dangerous, mebbe fatal, to my men to cross an open strip of prairie. But my officer thought I had played off. I didn't have any bed rock proof that the woolly-whipper was dangerous, so I got busted. How did your gang hear about it?"

"Look here," Hastings retorted. "If you hadn't saved my life ten minutes ago, I'd tell you to go to the devil!"

Several other times that afternoon, as constable and prisoner headed north toward the post, Hastings swung the talk back to Ruth Welliston and tried to make the constable believe she was his sister.

Gray did not know what to think; he was on the fence about Hastings. The man seemed to know a good many little items which gave a color of truth to his story. He knew several personal, intimate happenings between Gray and Ruth Welliston, such as a girl might well write to a brother, but hardly would disclose to other people.

At first Gray suspected that his prisoner was a wonderfully slick talker and the quickest witted criminal he had bumped into in a coon's age. But gradually Hastings began to swing him around and make

him believe that Ruth Welliston actually was his sister, as he said.

IV.

JUST about dusk the pair reached a cabin on the edge of a few acres of timber. The cabin was a stop-off for freight haulers in summer, and a home for a night to anybody passing through the hundred and twenty mile strip from settlement to settlement. It contained a bunk, stove, table, a wall bench, and a few cooking tins.

Gray picketed the two horses behind the shack and led his prisoner inside.

"We'll lay up here to-night. While I cook supper, you see how quiet you can sit on the bunk. Otherwise I'll have to tie you fast. I'd hate to do that, because if you're Ruth's brother you'd give me a black eye to her."

Hastings went over to the bunk without any argument. Gray took some bacon and meal from his saddle bags, built a fire, and began cooking. It was a brief process.

"Grub pile!" he announced in seven or eight minutes as he forked the burned bacon and corn cakes upon a platter.

Hastings stepped over and sat down. Gray found a pair of candle stubs on the shelf, and lit them for the table.

"You might untie me till I eat," Hastings suggested.

"Not on your tintype," Gray said pleasantly. "I don't mind feeding you. I untied a fellow once."

"What happened?"

"I don't exactly know. He throwed pepper in my eyes and I couldn't see just what I was doing to him after I lunged and grabbed him. So I had to give him aplenty to make sure I was giving him enough."

Hastings laughed. He seemed to take no offense at all at the constable's refusal. Gray was more than ever persuaded that the man from Laramie was all right, and had just stumbled into his predicament with the ranchers.

"Bacon and a tin skillet," Hastings remarked presently, "don't make a working combination. Why don't you open the window and let out the smoke?"

Gray saw nothing harmful about that. The bacon smoke was smarting his eyes, too. He stepped to the window, opened it, and came back.

A couple of minutes later, as he was holding a meal cake for the prisoner to eat, he saw Hastings glance at the window and start suddenly.

At that same instant, before he could turn his head, a voice outside the window growled at him:

"Put your hands up, yuh yellow striped—They's two rifles coverin' yuh."

At the first word Gray's right hand started for his belt. But it stopped. The sharp, metallic *snick-snick* of two rifles being cocked made him realize it was suicide to resist. There was no help for it; slowly his hands went up.

"Stand up!" his unseen captor growled. "Two of us is comin' in an' hogtie yuh. The other two 'll be coverin' yuh. Keep 'em up. Don't move. We're not pussy-footin'."

Two men stumped into the cabin, walked up behind Gray, relieved him of his belt gun, bound his hands behind his back, and with the same rope tied his ankles together. When they had finished trussing him up, the other two come in.

The quartet stepped in front of him.

One man in the party was a stranger to Gray. But the other three—he recognized that trio in his first startled glance.

There was no smile, no triumph on their faces; nothing but a vengeful hatred.

V.

DREAD MINER's career of crime started in 1859, during the Fraser River rush, when he drove a pickax into the brain of his partner and went out with their mutual earnings for his own.

In the Black Hills, in Nevada, the Kootenay, the Columbia—wherever a gold field flourished—he added to his red record year after year, all during the war-stricken '60's and the "railroad '70's."

There had been five of the Miner boys, all of them men of the same criminal type, abnormally intelligent, and endowed with extra keen physical faculties. At different

times three of them had made mistakes in their technique, and had paid at the end of a rope.

Dread, the eldest, and his youngest brother still survived, despite rewards, armed hunts and the efforts of sheriffs, troopers and mounted police to capture them. At times they worked together, at other times alone. Their range was all the Western territories and north into Canada.

It was averred by men who knew that "Pickax" Miner's sole human trait was a strong affection toward his younger brother.

For the last two years Dread and two helpers had been shooting up stages along the pony routes that led away from the Northern Pacific. The previous fall, trailed and surrounded, they had broken through a cordon of man-hunters and vanished. In March an Indian scout brought rumor to Double-Bend Post that they were hiding out near the border.

After searching fruitlessly for three weeks, Gray had begun to think the rumor was only a rumor. But now he saw it was the sorry truth.

"Breed Dunn," the second of the trio, was a stocky Sioux *meti*, whose tracking and scouting abilities in the woods and on the plains, were proverbial even among the Indians. The third criminal, "Dook" Sazen, a languid, city type man of scarcely twenty-four, seemed ill-assorted with the other two. But his "good parts," which earned him his sobriquet, made him invaluable in slipping into the towns to find out about possible rich hauls or pursuit parties.

The outlaw himself was a thin, hard-faced man, nearly fifty years old. Slow and mechanical usually in his movements, he could snap like a taut bow string. Looking into his eyes not two feet away, Gray was appalled by their human hatred. It was unnatural; it was unnerving.

"Yuh yaller stripes," Miner began, in his raucous voice, "yuh been sayin' yuh'd learn me a lesson if yuh ever got on my trail. D'yuh reckon I might learn your outfit a lesson by makin' an example of th' first yaller stripe I caught?"

Gray did not answer. He thought the savage threat was a bluff. He reasoned that no man in his right mind would bring

down upon himself the hot wrath of the whole mounted police merely to make a defiant gesture. For, soon or late, the deed would be known; there were four witnesses.

"D'yuh know—" Miner demanded, thrusting his face up close. "D'yuh know why I didn't shoot yuh when I covered yuh through th' open winder?"

"I can't say," Gray answered coolly.

"Because I wanted yuh to know first why yuh're bein' sent hellwards. Yuh killed my brother, yuh—yuh—" His voice choked as he spewed vile epithets at the constable.

The accusation struck Gray like a thunderbolt, and left him cold. In the eyes of Pickax Miner he read a deadly intention.

The outlaw was going to kill him.

He got hold of himself in a moment or two, and stared back at Miner.

"I never clapped eyes on your brother. You're an infernal liar when you say I killed him!"

"Yuh didn't kill him with a knife or bullet. But yuh killed him just th' same. Yuh're th' man. I swore I'd git yuh. An', by the eternal, I've done it!"

"A month ago durin' that woolly whipper, yuh, with that patrol, got on his trail. Him an' his partners was in shelter. Yuh forced 'em south on th' open plain. They got caught; four of 'em froze to death. This man here was th' only one that saved himself. Yuh done it; yuh are goin' to pay!"

"Lord above!" Gray exclaimed softly as the whole truth broke upon him.

There was no use denying the accusation. They *knew*. There was no use fighting against his doom. He saw that in Dread Miner's bitter hate.

His eyes wandered through the open window to a blood-red tinge low in the western foothills. The beauty of the sky, the peacefulness of the twilight prairie that he *knew* and loved, steadied him and helped him face his death. In a few moments he looked at the outlaw again.

"All right. What you say is true. You've got me. I'm ready."

There was a grim irony in his fate. He had been demoted for letting the horse runners escape. Now he was to be murdered for having killed them!

Miner snapped an order to the Sioux breed.

"Git over by th' door. Keep an eye out."

As the breed obeyed, Gray, with an effort, turned to Hastings. His voice was low and vibrant with scorn.

"This man"—he nodded toward Miner—"he has at least an excuse for killing me. I was the cause of his brother's death. And I never did him a good turn. But you—you're a low-life cur compared to him. I saved you from a cottonwood limb six hours ago. Now you turned on me. You saw these men outside. That's why you asked me to open the windows—so they'd have a clear chance to cover me."

Hastings got up and sneered at him. All the politeness and decency which he had showed toward Gray that afternoon dropped away from him.

"Sure I did. D'you think I wanted you to take me on in to the post?"

Miner looked Hastings up and down. He had paid no attention to the man before, beyond noticing that he was securely bound.

"What 're yuh doin' here?"

Hastings did not cringe under the outlaw's eyes. His best cue was a bold front.

"Are them eyes of yours ornaments, or can you use 'em? This yellow-stripe was taking me in."

"What for?"

"Horse running."

"Was yuh ridin' this Wiggly-N bronc outside th' shack? How d'yuh git hold of that horse?"

Hastings told him; told him substantially the same story he had told Gray.

"That might likely be true," said the fourth of the outlaws, the man whom Gray did not know. "That bronc was in our string. He'd just about drift down there with th' woolly-whipper."

"What's your business around here?" Miner demanded.

"It's none of yours."

The outlaw stepped up to him and thrust a knife against his ribs.

"Yuh better answer questions. We ain't particular about havin' any witnesses

left. Open up. What was yuh comin' north of th' line for?"

"It wasn't healthy for me south of it."

"Why so?"

Hastings hesitated. A prick of the knife opened his lips.

"I killed a prospector coming out of Kootenay."

"What for?"

"His poke. What the devil d'you suppose?"

"Where is it?"

"I cached it. It was a considerable amount, and I was afraid of having to explain if I got caught with it."

Miner wetted his lips. His eyelids narrowed.

"Where'd yuh cache it?"

Hastings looked him up and down deliberately.

"D'you think I'm a jackass?" he asked bluntly. "The minute I'd tell you, you'd stick that knife in me. But if I don't tell you, you'll have to come to taw."

In spite of his scorn for Hastings, Gray could not help admiring his quickness of wit. He foresaw what was coming.

"How much was in that poke?" Miner asked.

"Somewhere around twelve thousand."

"Yuh'll take us to it?"

"On conditions I might."

"Well, what's your digger?"

"Fifty-fifty. Then you go your way, and I go mine."

Miner studied a moment. He nodded. Gray could read the murderous intention in his mind. He laughed grimly to himself.

"Thank God, that Hastings Coyote will get what he deserves!" he thought. When he takes this trio to the cache, they'll knife him so quick he won't know how he died."

Miner first searched him for weapons, made sure he had none, and then cut his bonds with his knife. Hastings stepped up to Gray, who was tied so hard and fast that he could scarcely move a finger.

"You was easy," he sneered. "I'd have got away to-morrow anyhow. Why, when I asked you to open the window so these men could get the drop on you, you

nearly fell down obliging me. There's just one thing—you called me a liar this afternoon, you—"

He spat in the helpless constable's face. The other four men laughed. Gray went livid with anger at the dastardly act. Bound as he was, he propelled his body at his insulter. Hastings stepped aside and laughed as Gray sprawled full length to the floor.

"Let's eat," he suggested cold-bloodedly. "The ceremony 'll take some little time, and I'm hungry."

The suggestion appealed to Miner—but for a different reason.

"A damn good notion. It 'll give him a few more minutes to be thinkin' pleasant thoughts."

Sazen and the horse runner dragged Gray to the bunk and roughly tumbled him in. Then Sazen went outside to the outlaw's saddles and brought in some salt-horse and bread.

With a rifle on his knees the breed sat silently in the doorway, listening and watching out over the prairies. Till the food was ready, Miner stood in the middle of the cabin, his Winchester still in the hollow of his arm. Liddell hastily got the meal.

Watching the horse thief in the candle-light, Gray swore bitterly at his evil luck. This man, Liddell, was the bed-rock proof which would restore the sergeantcy. Of his gang, only he had come through the blizzard alive, and that by a blind stumble upon a wolfer's shack. The others had met death in the storm—as the police patrol would have met death. But that proof, now, had come all too late.

"God!" he groaned. "If only I had one chance in a million to escape! But they've got me. Got me hard and fast."

The four men sat down at the table. Hopeless and helpless, Gray watched them. They ate in silence for a couple of minutes; rapidly, noisily, without speaking.

"Any water round here?" Hastings grunted finally between bites of bread.

"They's a spring behind th' shack," the horse runner volunteered.

"Take the yellow-stripe's canteen and fetch some," Hastings bade him.

"Who made yuh boss?"

"Go an' git it, Liddell," Miner ordered the horse thief.

Liddell came back with the canteen. It was passed around. The grub pile rapidly vanished.

"Hullo!" Hastings remarked, stopping a hunk of salt-horse halfway to his lips. "You there?" He spoke to the breed in the doorway. "Why don't you come eat?"

"Keep yur gab to yurself," Miner snapped at Hastings. "I put him there to watch."

"All right. I just didn't want to see him get left," Hastings answered.

He piled the last three slices of bacon on a piece of bread, got up, and went to give it to the breed. Gray, watching him, could understand the move. Hastings probably knew they would try to kill him when he led them to the cache. He was trying to curry friendship with one man in the outfit.

The other three men at the table went on eating.

As Hastings got within a step of the Sioux breed something happened—happened so lightninglike that Gray could hardly follow the movements.

Gray had stood his carbine against the wall when he first came in. As Hastings reached the food to the breed with his left hand his right hand darted out and seized the gun in the middle, over the magazine. With a side swipe the butt caught the Sioux breed a smashing blow in the back of his head and knocked him stiff.

The butt of the carbine seemed to fly on up to Hasting's shoulder as he whirled to face the other three men.

Dread Miner had swung around and flashed his belt-gun even as he swung. In the semigloom the carbine threw a rope of fire halfway to him. The belt-gun dropped from his shattered arm.

"Steady, steady; up high—high," Hastings rasped at Sazen and Liddell. "One—two—"

They reached for the roof.

In the taut silence Gray could hear the heavy breathing of the four men. He himself was not breathing.

Hastings did not move a muscle. The gun butt lay against his cheek; its cower-

ing muzzle pointed a finger of death at the outlaws. He stood like a granite statue, tensed, rigid.

Though his mind was in a whirl at the sudden, staggering coup Hastings had worked, Gray nevertheless realized that Hastings was helpless; that neither he nor the outlaws dared move. The situation hung perilous; it might break either way.

"Steady, partner!" He found his voice. "Hold 'em. I'll help you."

He managed to slide out of his bunk and get to his feet. By twisting on his heels and toes he inched up near the table, where he was in the circle of candle light.

"Take your knife in your good hand, Pick-ax," he ordered the outlaw. "Stand arm's length away from me, and between me and the table. Cut me loose."

"You heard him," Hastings snapped. "Be very careful not to make a mis-move. This trigger is eared up already."

The outlaw snarled a refusal.

The muzzle of the carbine swerved an inch and pointed at his head.

"One—two—"

Miner obeyed. As the severed rope fell to his feet Gray stooped and picked up Miner's weapon.

"Get their guns from the other two, partner," Hastings told him.

But Gray did not. For out of the tail of his eye he caught a movement behind Hastings, in the doorway. In the darkness it was slight as a shadow flitting; but it was all the warning that Gray needed.

With one jump he reached the breed. Even as he kicked the rifle muzzle up the gun went off and buried its bullet in the log rafter over Hastings's head.

Still groggy from the crack Hastings had given him, the Sioux breed tried to rise and draw his knife against the constable. With Miner's belt-gun Gray hit him over the temple. Then he dragged him inside the cabin.

Hastings had not batted an eye nor moved a muscle at the fight behind him. He dared not.

With a length of the severed rope Gray bound the breed's hands.

"Now, then, I'll get their guns, partner," said he to Hastings. "Sorry I couldn't

oblige you a minute ago. But I didn't want this cuss to blow the back of your head off."

He stepped around behind the two men and drew out their guns. Only then did Hastings relax a trifle. But the muzzle still covered the outlaws unwaveringly.

"That's right, son," he remarked coolly, as Gray started to tie them up. "Good and damn tight. Take your time; I'm still on the job with this Snider."

Gray tied up Sazen and Liddell as he had done the breed, and then bound Miner's good arm to his side.

The carbine came down slowly. Hastings stepped forward into the full light. He looked at Gray. A broad grin spread slowly from one ear to the other. He drew a deep breath.

"Well, old-timer," he chuckled. "What I mean, we just naturally euchred this quartet, you and me did!"

VI.

SOME ten minutes afterward Gray finished dressing Pick-ax Miner's arm and stepped to the door of the cabin, where Hastings sat with a Winchester across his knees. The other three prisoners had been double bound, but their captors were taking no chances. They had bagged four rare prizes and knew it.

A moon was just halfway up above the horizon. When it got an hour high they intended to start.

"We're high-tailing it to the Double-Bend post *hiya* fast," Gray remarked. "Miner's arm is all right now, but he ought to get to a doctor as soon as possible. Besides, the post needs the information that this man Liddell can give 'em. You remember," he added with a grin, "the information I told Charley Davis I was going to extract from you."

"You dry up about that. My neck is still itching. If you ever remind me of that again I'll give you a black eye—over at Double-Bend Settlement. But see here: when you come trotting in with Pick-ax and his right and left bower and this horse runner and *your bed-rock proof about the blizzard*, what's your officer going to do?"

"I hope to be sewing a three-stripe chev-

ron back on my arm—or having some one else sew it on.”

They filled their pipes and lit from the same match.

“Tell you, Gray,” Hastings chuckled, “if these ducks hadn’t shown up and tried to murder you, I’d been in one sweet predicament. I’m tickled inside out. Why so? Well, see here. We’re even up now; fifty-fifty, tit for tat, quits—to be brief, you and

me are squared. But suppose I hadn’t got a chance to pay it back! Suppose I’d have to live the rest of my born days feeling I owed you my life! A plain brother-in-law is a mean enough animal. If you owe ’im your life to boot— But I forgot; you don’t believe Ruth is my sister, do you?”

“You quiet down,” Gray ordered him. “If you ever mention that again, I’ll report you for killing that Kootenay prospector!”

THE END



THE BALLAD OF THE HOMESICK COWBOY

THIS dog-goned city’s got my goat; I want to pull my freight
 An’ head for somewhere far out West that’s not so up-to-date.
 I want to ride an old cow hoss—to heck with these sedans;
 I want to feel an honest breeze not from electric fans.
 I want my meals o’ pork an’ beans, an’ coffee with ’em, too;
 I’m sick o’ foreign dishes with a demi-tasse when through.
 I’m sick o’ havin’ waiters hangin’ ’round me when I eat—
 For service our chuck wagon’s a café that can’t be beat.

I want to see the kind o’ gals they raise out on the plains;
 I’m fed up on these flappers an’ these painted city janes.
 I’d like to see a dance where I could one-step in my boots,
 An’ wear a pair o’ corduroys—to thunder with dress suits!
 I’m gettin’ tired o’ shavin’ an’ o’ dollin’ up each day
 An’ stayin’ up till 3 A.M. before I hit the hay.
 I’d like to sleep one night again out underneath the stars
 An’ hear the lowin’ cattle ’stead o’ hummin’ motor cars.

I’m homesick, boy, I’m homesick, an’ I want to be again
 Away out West where gals is gals an’ men is really men.
 I want again to feel my knees a-straddle a cayuse
 An’ try my hand to see if I can’t swing a wicked noose.
 I want to try my hand at throwin’ cattle on the run,
 An’ even mendin’ fence would be to me a lot o’ fun.
 This city life is great old stuff—at least, that’s what they say—
 But for myself I’d rather be a cowhand any day.

Lester Raymond Cash.



The Hole in the Wall

By **FRED MACISAAC**

Author of "The Vanishing Professor," "West of Broadway," etc.

CHAPTER XV (Continued).

FLEETWOOD'S DECISION.

FOR several days Terhune had been opening his morning paper, wavering between hope and fear, and looking in vain for the news of the murder of a man named John Green in New York City.

Miss Murphy, two mornings after the events just related, laid an envelope marked "Personal" upon the acting president's desk.

He tore it open and read the defiance of Spencer Fleetwood. Terhune saw red for a moment. He grasped his telephone and called for police headquarters, but by the time the office had the police department on the line he had changed his mind. Under no circumstances could he chance having Fleetwood tell the police that Terhune had

hired him to kill John Doran. The slightest suspicion of such a plot would ruin him inevitably.

The man had not only mulcted the company of ten thousand dollars, but he had pocketed the fifteen thousand blood money, probably laughing in his sleeve at the gullibility of Terhune. Undoubtedly the fellow had only pretended to agree, had snatched at an opportunity to get out of Chicago unpunished. And the worst of it was that he would have to make good that twenty-five thousand dollars, and there wasn't a thing he could do to Fleetwood.

If Spencer had a little more courage, he could have bearded this suppositious lion in his den; he was only a jackal masquerading in a lion's skin. But Fleetwood was another jackal.

And so ended as wild and melodramatic a plot against a man's life as was ever con-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 19.

ceived in the movies. It simply petered out because cold-blooded murder is as foreign to the nature of the average American as eating snails or petting snakes.

If Terhune were still bent on obliterating his employer, he was now in a position where he could not carry it out. The existence of Fleetwood, who might come forward after Doran's death with the story of the former plot, was an insurmountable obstacle.

Besides, Terhune had begun to see another way out of his difficulties which still boded ill for Doran, although it did not mean his personal extinction. Half an hour later he was at work on this angle.

Fleetwood need not have worried about trouble from the Doran Corporation; his defalcation was already covered up, and Terhune's personal check replaced the fifteen thousand of the company's money paid to Fleetwood the day he left Chicago. His slate was clean.

Not knowing this, and being human, he worried much, and for many weeks skulked in the outskirts of New York, dodging down side streets when he saw a policeman, fearing at every moment the descent of a heavy hand upon his shoulder and a gruff voice saying:

"Spencer Fleetwood, you are wanted."

CHAPTER XVI.

AMBITIOUS PLANS.

NO premonition of imminent death had occurred to John Green, not even at the moment when he strolled past the dark doorway where a hired assassin in the person of Spencer Fleetwood was drawing an automatic with the intention of sending a stream of bullets through him. Perhaps it was that there are really no such things as premonitions, or perhaps Fleetwood was not actually a menace; that he never would have mustered up sufficient courage to fire, even if the professional yeggman had not selected that second to use his blackjack.

Fleetwood, the fiancé of Georgia Mainwaring, had completely slipped from Doran's recollection. He had kept his promise

to Georgia when he told his manager to give the young man a chance. At the present time he didn't think about Georgia; she belonged to a past that was fading in the manifold duties of the present.

One of the secrets of Doran's success had been his extraordinary powers of concentration. He could shut himself up in a room with a problem and forget everything in the world but that particular problem. His problem at present was making a success of the Yellow Shop, and when that institution was completely on its feet he might extend his activities.

If he had wasted four or five months because of the attractions of Lady Dorothy Devon, he had learned a lesson by the near collapse of the Yellow Shop, and now he was to all intents and purposes an earnest young stationer with a faithful partner, working twelve hours a day at the business of selling small wares.

It was characteristic of him that he had not made any effort to follow the fortunes of the Doran Corporation. He considered that it was in competent hands with a surplus sufficient to enable it to weather all gales. He had observed the shrinkage of its advertising space in the columns of the magazines in his shops; had assumed that Terhune was economizing, and though he might have taken the opposite tack had he been in charge, he did not criticize his successor for his management.

Recently he had observed that the Doran advertisements were back to the old size, and he permitted himself a smile as he thought that Terhune had realized his error. He felt no urge to go back and resume the helm. He was singularly contented lately; his days were full, he had no time for play; he was in constant touch with the ordinary, every-day sort of folks who came into the shop, and he enjoyed the human contact from which he had been shut off for many years.

It was very pleasant to chat with Elsie during their leisure moments. Since that day in the park the girl had continued to surprise him by her observations on men and things. She was a remarkable little personality, and she had begun to interest him greatly.

Never having been in love, he did not know the symptoms, and he did not connect the satisfaction he felt in watching her with the tender passion. If you had questioned him, he would have confessed, perhaps, that he was in love with Lady Dorothy Devon. That farewell kiss still tingled on his lips when he thought of it, and he received a letter from her every now and then which was full of her caustic but amusing personality.

If she were still free when he had carried out the terms of his agreement with Jones, he might look her up with the object of matrimony, he thought, a little lazily. She certainly would be a beautiful ornament at the head of his table when he returned to Chicago and opened a big house, if he ever did. His old life in Chicago didn't appeal to him any more. He considered Sorrento, Lake Como, loafing in Egypt, roaming over Moorish Spain, when he thought of leaving New York some far distant time in the future.

It was at this time that the proprietor of a little Italian restaurant in another ramshackle old building four doors down gave up the ghost, and the "To Let" sign appeared on the window.

"What's the matter with renting that place and moving into it?" he demanded of Elsie. "It's four times as big as this. We could enlarge our stock, and become a real store. We could retain all our patrons, paint the front yellow, like this, and make some real money."

"How greedy you are!" she smiled. "We are doing better than two hundred dollars a week here. Supposing somebody who knows what a nice trade we have moves into this place and steals part of our business? I have an idea that it is because it's such a cunning hole in the wall that we do so well."

"You may be right, at that. I'm not sure there is business enough for a heavier line of goods than we carry. But supposing Rothstein, who tried to get this place, should slip in there and give us some stiff competition?"

"We can't hire every shop on the block to prevent that sort of thing," she demurred.

"I might take over the lease and sublet it only to somebody who didn't compete with us."

"And if you didn't sublet, you would be stuck, wouldn't you? That's the second restaurant that has failed to make a living there."

"Well, I'm going to find out about the lease. I've got some kind of hunch I'm working on."

"Whatever you decide to do you know will be satisfactory to me," she said, with a smile which spoke volumes. "We've got nearly two thousand dollars in the bank, and I suppose we are getting too prosperous."

Doran visited the agent, found the rent of the decayed café was two hundred and fifty per month, and paid fifty dollars for a month's option.

"It's a speculation," he told Elsie. "I'm going to try to sublet it before the option runs out. If I don't, I'll lose the fifty dollars. Tell any likely-looking customer that we have rented the place and ask them to send persons they believe to be prospective tenants to us."

"We are embarking in the real estate business, are we?" she smiled.

"Fifty dollars' worth. If we win out, we'll try it somewhere else on a bigger scale. It's about time we expanded. I've got an option on a five years' lease of the place. You never can tell what will happen in five years."

John visited around the neighborhood, dropped into real estate offices, tried hard to locate a customer for the vacant store, but the prospects looked dubious. Not only the two restaurants of which Elsie had spoken, but four others had failed on that spot in six or seven years.

The place had always been rented for a café, and no one seemed to consider it now for that or anything else. Doran began to think of installing some shoe machinery, hiring shoemakers and opening a rapid shoe repair establishment, since he had discovered nothing of the kind in the neighborhood, when he was summoned by phone to the office of the agent of his own building.

"Sit down, Mr. Green," said the agent.

"Would you consider selling your lease of the Yellow Shop?"

"No," he replied promptly.

"I might be able to make you a good offer, and find you an equally good location."

"I've been in New York long enough to know I might move around the corner and three-quarters of my customers would never come again."

"Your lease runs out in less than three years."

"With an option of a five-year renewal at an increased rental. I am prepared to pay the increase when that time comes around."

"Would you consider an offer of five thousand cash for your lease, with the privilege of being a tenant at will, rent free? You might remain there several years without being disturbed."

"You haven't much idea of the business I am doing."

"I know you are doing very well, but of course I have no idea of your net revenue."

"I'll surprise you. It's over ten thousand dollars a year."

"You surprise me all right. I see the figure I offered you is too low. I'll get in touch with the owner, and let you hear from me in a few days."

John left the agent's office busy in mind. Something was in the wind, he did not know what; but he would find out. He returned to the shop, then went out and measured the front of the building.

It was about sixty feet wide. It ran back about eighty feet, opened into a yard which backed up against another yard belonging to a disreputable looking lodging house on the street behind. There were several of these houses.

He walked around to the back street and saw a "For Sale" sign on one of the houses, while the other two in the block were down at the heel and plastered with "Rooms to Let" signs.

He made a note of the name of the agent, and went immediately to see him. What was the price of the house which was for sale.

"They are asking twenty-two thousand

dollars," said the agent after looking it up in his catalogue.

"I'll pay five hundred dollars cash for a three months' option at that price, with the privilege of renewing the option for a thousand dollars."

"In view of the fact that the house has been on the market for five years without a bite, I'll just close that matter here and now," said the agent. "I suppose you have something up your sleeve."

"I am speculating," John replied truthfully.

When he left the office he had the option, and the bank account of the Yellow Shop was five hundred dollars less affluent. He then called on the agents of the other two houses, and found that one had been sold within three days and the other was not on the market.

He returned to the shop a bit apprehensive, for he had to tell Elsie what he had done.

She turned pale at the news, but said nothing.

"You don't ask me why I did it?"

"I have sufficient confidence in your judgment not to protest, but I would like to know what on earth you want of that disreputable old brick house."

"I have a hunch that a theater is going up here. This building is wide enough for the lobby, but they need those three old houses back there for the stage. The auditorium will be in the back yards and the rear of this building. The fact that one of the houses has just been sold and that our agent is trying to buy our lease is all the dope I want."

"But supposing that nothing happens for three months and your option runs out?"

"I'll put up another thousand and renew it."

"Then we won't have any money," she wailed.

"Listen, Elsie. I'll tell you how we shall get the money. I expect to be offered ten thousand dollars for the lease of this little shop. I'll take it, and we'll move into the restaurant I took an option upon for speculation. With the ten thousand I can buy the house in the rear. It is in the middle

of the block. The other two houses will do them no good without mine, and they will have to buy it at my price."

"But supposing they don't want to put up a theater here, or perhaps only a little theater. Then what becomes of your old house?"

"This is a very logical place for a theater. It's one of the few blocks in the Forties where there's not one or two already. They are not building little theaters any more. The idea is to run through an entire block."

"But they may abandon the enterprise if they find that you own that house. How much do you suppose you can get for it?"

"Forty or fifty thousand dollars."

"It seems like taking an unfair advantage."

He laughed. "Business success consists in beating the other fellow to it. As I figure things, the owner of this building has an offer for it. He has to get hold of his leases so that he can turn it over clear. He is probably closer to what is going on in the real estate world than the people who own the old houses on the back street. I'll bet you that it is the owner of this building who bought one of the houses, and by this afternoon or to-morrow he will get around to trying to pick up mine."

"It's all such pure speculation," she said.

"You actually haven't a thing to go on."

"Don't you worry. You'll see."

Elsie's apprehension seemed to be justified next afternoon when Perkins, the agent of the building, strolled into the store.

"Hello, Mr. Green," he said cheerfully.

"I just wanted to tell you not to get your hopes up about selling this lease. It was a mare's nest. The whole thing is off."

John was a good poker player. He never moved a muscle of his face at this alarming information.

"Suits me," he said. "I told you I didn't want to sell."

"All right," retorted the agent, who turned to go.

John busied himself arranging some stock.

"You'd better get rid of that option you took on the house out back," suggested the agent casually. "You are stuck right."

"Much obliged for your advice, Mr. Perkins."

Poor Elsie sank into her chair and buried her face in her hands.

"I've tried so hard," she said, half sobbing.

"What's the matter, Elsie?"

"You see how wrong you were about this lease and the house and the theater and everything."

John laughed heartily. "Poor kid! You wouldn't be expected to understand, but that fellow has just confirmed my suspicions. In the first place, he came into my office. Do you suppose he took the trouble to come down here just to tell me that he wasn't going to buy my lease. Why, I told him I didn't want to sell. And in the next place, if the houses in the rear were not part of the deal, how do you suppose he was so quickly acquainted with the fact that I have an option on the one in the middle? Now I know the deal is going through. All we've got to do is sit tight."

It didn't look like it, however, for a fortnight went by and nothing happened. Then the option on the restaurant was about to expire, and John drew two hundred and fifty dollars from their slim bank account and paid the first month's rent. He discovered by careful inquiry that every lease in the building except his own had been taken up by the agent, and all other occupants were tenants at will, some of them rent free. This knowledge convinced him that the building would come down very shortly.

At the end of another week he was summoned into the real estate office, and there found Perkins and another man, who was introduced as Henry Meehan, owner of the building.

"Look here, Green," said Perkins. "You've bitten off more than you can chew. You took an unfair advantage of confidential information when you went around and got an option on that brick house. Now, we want to be fair with you, and we'll take the option off your hands for three thousand dollars, giving you a good profit on your 'smart Aleck' stunt, when you deserve to be stuck."

"What did your offer to buy my lease

have to do with my taking an option on a house on another street?"

"It gave you a tip there was something doing in the neighborhood."

"And do you never act on a tip of that kind, Mr. Perkins?"

"That's my business. You are a shopkeeper, and you better stick to your game. What do you know about real estate?"

"Enough to take a tip."

"Well, you won't get away with it, Mr. Green," said Meehan. "I don't propose to be held up. I've investigated you, and find you haven't any money. Now I won't buy your lease; I'll pull the building down over your head, pile up the sidewalk with rubbish so your customers can't get in or out, and ruin your business."

"I'll get an injunction to prevent that. You have got to make me a reasonable offer for my lease. I do not refuse to sell. You might have a right to pull down the building if I refused all offers, but I am ready to talk business."

"You haven't got money enough to take me into the courts. I happen to know your exact bank balance."

"The trouble with you fellows," said Green, with a confident grin, "is that you think I am just a small vendor of newspapers and magazines, and that I don't know anything about business. Well, I happen to have a partner in this affair, and I'll match dollar for dollar with you as far as you want to go."

The two men exchanged glances. This put a different face on the matter, for they knew that there were scores of real estate speculators who would be glad to go in with a man who had a straight tip on a big increase in values. Green, too, impressed them. Meehan expected to meet a timid little shopkeeper, and here was a competent, capable fellow, who looked as though he could sit in at a big game.

"Well, what's your proposition?" said Meehan. "I want your lease and I want your option on that brick house."

"They are both for sale."

"But what's your figure?"

"I haven't any desire to hold you gentlemen up, but this is a two or three million dollar enterprise, and I happen to have

an advantageous position. I want ten thousand dollars for my lease, and twenty-five thousand for my option. Take it or leave it."

"You must be crazy."

"Any court which examined my books will agree that you should pay me a fair price for the lease. My total net income from the shop is at the rate of ten thousand dollars a year. No argument about that. As for the house, my partner and myself can take it over for twenty-two thousand, and sell it for sixty if we hold out."

"But you haven't got the twenty-two thousand."

"Don't kid yourselves."

"I'll give you thirty thousand for the lease and the option."

"I'll split the difference. A certified check for thirty-two thousand five hundred dollars to-day closes the deal. To-morrow my price is thirty-five again."

"You win," laughed Perkins. "Get out your checkbook, Meehan."

The check was signed and sent out to the bank on the corner to be certified. The messenger was back in five minutes. In the meantime Meehan proffered cigars.

"I don't grudge you your profit," said the owner of the building as he handed John the check. "You beat Perkins here to the owner of that house, and by rights he ought to stand the loss. You were content with a reasonable gain, that's something. If you had tried to hold me up I would have fought you up through all the courts until the cows came home."

"I figured you would," said John, as he folded the check in his pocket. "And as my partner happens to be the young lady in my store, I wasn't really prepared for a long fight."

Perkins looked at Meehan, and Meehan looked at Perkins.

"Bluffed, by heck!" said Perkins. Meehan laughed wryly.

"What is a con man like you doing in a notion shop?" demanded Meehan. "You ought to be out selling gold bricks."

"I happened to need a little capital, and you gentlemen have given it to me. From now on, watch my smoke."

John hastened with seven league boots

to the Yellow Shop and proudly showed Elsie the check.

"You mean to say you made all that money!" she exclaimed, dazzled by the big figures.

"We made all that money. Half of it is yours."

"That's absurd," she declared. "I had nothing to do with the transaction except to throw cold water on it."

"I used the firm's bank account, and if I failed we would both have been ruined, therefore you share in the winnings."

"It isn't fair. I didn't earn it."

"I bet you suffered more than I did."

"That's true. I haven't slept for a week," she confessed.

"What are we going to do with all that money?" he demanded.

"Fix up the new store, lay in a bigger stock, and put the rest in the bank," she said. "When do we move?"

"The sooner the better. We can keep this place open till they start to tear the building down, and in that way steer all our customers to the new place. But to-night you and I will go to the Ritz to dinner, attend the Follies, and then to the most expensive dancing club in town."

Her eyes shone, but her judgment was still on the job.

"And who will keep the shop open?"

"Lock it up for once."

"No, sir. We can't afford to do any such thing. I'll bring an evening dress gown, dress here, after we've closed for the night, and then go somewhere to dance if you insist."

"I feel like celebrating," he persisted. "This is some clean-up for a little stationery shop."

"We mustn't lose our heads. Remember that we are going into a new store and operate in a larger way, and we may not be successful. I've always thought that it was this hole in the wall which was responsible for our good luck."

"My dear girl, there are ten thousand holes in the wall in New York whose proprietors are starving, as poor Mat O'Brien was when I bought him out. If we have been successful it is because this was the only hole in the wall which had a girl like

you to manage it. If it hadn't been for you the place would have been bankrupt two months ago, and I would have been sleeping in the park, perhaps."

"Rubbish!" said Elsie, but her cheeks flushed pink at his approbation.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BUNGLING MATCHMAKER.

THE wine of success did not exactly go to Doran's head, but it exhilarated him considerably, and it made him a bit impatient with the humdrum shopkeeping. He had had one of the flashes of intuition, combined with the dashing courage, which had created the Doran Corporation, and as a result earned more in two or three weeks than the Yellow Shop could have netted in three years.

After all, that was the way to do business. A few more coups of this description and he would be well on his way to winning, demonstrating that the right kind of a man could make several fortunes. Capital was all he had ever needed, and now he had it.

He left most of the details of fixing up the new shop to Elsie, listened absent-mindedly to her plans, acquiesced without knowing exactly to what he had agreed.

He proposed that they each draw ten thousand dollars out of the firm and place it to their individual accounts, which would still leave a snug balance of twelve thousand dollars to the credit of the Yellow Shop.

The girl had to agree. It was his money, in her opinion; she had no jurisdiction over it. She demurred at drawing out her share, and when she did, at his insistence, it was with the mental reservation that she was trusteeing it for the firm. He had also proposed that each have a weekly drawing account of seventy-five dollars, since there was no longer any need for economy.

The new shop would have a considerably larger overhead than the old one. The rent was two hundred and fifty dollars a month instead of a hundred; they would need at least two clerks, since John was obviously preparing to branch out, and Elsie could not swing such a big place alone.

The character of the stock bothered her, but here John made a valuable suggestion.

"Every two or three blocks in New York is a separate village. I think we should run a sort of general store, dealing in everything that isn't perishable. We'll lay in a line of radio instruments and fancy canned goods. We'll get the agency of an expensive candy, and sell corsets."

"They are out," said Elsie. "No demand."

"Well, then, cigars, tobacco, candy, canned goods, perfumes, ribbons and laces, phonograph records, sheet music, books, magazines, papers, toilet things, a lending library, everything in a fancy way that a high class drug store sells, something of a haberdashery, collars, neckties, shoe laces, a ladies' dry goods store. Make it a clean, neat, breezy, well-lighted sort of corner emporium, where people of the neighborhood can stop in and buy almost anything they want. Don't forget the postage stamp feature, and all that goes with it."

"It will take a genius to arrange a shop with a stock like that and not have it look like a rummage sale."

"We can do it. Keep everything in wall cabinets, as few counters as possible, use the old kitchen as a storeroom for heavy goods not much in demand."

The next Sunday he invaded her dining room, and the pair hung over the dining room table working on plans for the arrangement of stock. John had a remarkable sense of order for a man, and he showed his partner how all the things he had suggested and many others could be carried without any effect of overcrowding.

"There are a lot of space-saving devices for showing goods," he explained; "they are expensive, but we must have them. I'll run downtown to-morrow and look over the store furnishing concerns for ideas."

"It will take a great deal of money to fix this place up," she said.

"Two or three thousand dollars for carpenter work, repairs and painting, about five or six thousand dollars for stock. Our credit is so good that I can get nearly all of it on from thirty to sixty days' time, so the actual cash investment isn't very large."

"But it will have to be paid for out of the earnings just the same."

"Certainly, but we are going to have greatly increased earnings over the Yellow Shop. Look at the room we have, the stock we can carry, the increased number of sales-people."

"If there is business enough for it all."

"Leave it to me to dig up the business. Oh, yes, we'll also run a renting office. Have people with rooms to rent list them with us, and we'll rent them for them."

"I suppose you'll be suggesting next that we carry a line of baby carriages and coffins."

"No babies in the neighborhood that I ever saw, and coffins take up too much room. They buy them from undertakers anyway, so they wouldn't sell. Might try pianos, though. No, too big, but we'll lay in some saxophones and ukuleles."

Elsie was laughing heartily, and just at this minute Mrs. Cohen busted in.

"Excuse me, I didn't know you had company. Oh, it's the lodger."

"You've met Mrs. Cohen," said Elsie, "Mr. Green."

"I looked him over the day he moved in," she said. "It's a pretty domestic picture I see before me. You might be married, you two."

"Oh," said Elsie, flushing, "how can you say such things?"

"He might do a lot worse," said the matron. "She's the finest little girl in the whole city of New York, Mr. Green, and I'm telling you that knows."

"Mrs. Cohen," said Elsie, her cheeks white and her eyes flashing with indignation, "I'll have you know that Mr. Green and myself are simply in business together. I am a widow with a child and I haven't any intention of being married again ever."

"I think you are perfectly right, Mrs. Cohen," said John, who was a little embarrassed. "Mrs. Evans has been the salvation of my business and any man who can make her marry him will be very lucky."

"Well," said the intruder, "a word to the wise is sufficient."

She went out with a satisfied chuckle.

"There now," said Elsie. - "She has spoiled things completely. Why can't

people believe that a man and a woman can be friends and even business partners without any question of sentiment?"

"Oh, she didn't mean any harm," said John, rather uneasily. "I think I'll take a run down town. We've about finished."

"And I'll see to Alicia. It's time I was getting her supper."

He beat a retreat, but Elsie, instead of getting Alicia's supper, went into her room, threw herself upon the bed and wept quietly for at least ten minutes.

The careful bachelor was thinking seriously as he went along the street. The question of marrying Elsie Evans had not occurred to him at any time during their association. He esteemed her as a charming and level-headed companion, and he believed that she accepted him upon the same basis. But it was evident that others could not understand the simplicity of their association, and in the interest of the young woman, he would have to change things.

He didn't need to economize any longer, and why continue to occupy a room in her apartment, since Elsie was also free from the necessity of keeping a lodger. It would save her a lot of work and prevent any future misunderstandings.

He was sure that Elsie would like to have her whole flat to herself again, and it had been stupid of him to stay on after the need had passed. It was because he was so comfortable that it had not occurred to him to move. Besides, he liked the hominess of the place and he adored the little girl, who seemed to reciprocate his affection.

It wouldn't be many months now before he could call on Standish Jones and overwhelm him with figures. Then he would make Elsie a present of the new Yellow Shop, which would fix her for life, and return to his own big business.

He might marry some gorgeous, glowing creature whose beauty and wit would make other men turn green with envy; some one like Lady Dorothy who could fit into the home of a multimillionaire with the ease and grace of ancestry and class.

He would often drop in on Elsie and see how she was getting along, keep a sort of distant guardianship over the Yellow Shop, make sure she never got into financial diffi-

culties. It would be kind of queer not to see her every day, such is the power of proximity.

He dropped into a Fifth Avenue hotel and dined comfortably and expensively. It was good to enjoy the product of a *cordon bleu* after his long months of abstinence. The hardships had done him no harm, enlarged his viewpoint. What he had learned about the idiosyncrasies of the buying public could be utilized with great profit in the management of the Doran Corporation.

John was feeling very well pleased with himself that evening. His self esteem, which had suffered considerably for a time, was beginning to resume its old sway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIMPLE LADY DOROTHY.

LOVELY Lady Dorothy Devon, as the newspapers called her, made a hit in Chicago. She played there four weeks, toured farther west and returned for two weeks more. Thanks to Standish Jones, who introduced her to a select party of his friends at a wonderful dinner in his big house on the Drive, she met a number of congenial men and women. Jones himself gave evidence of more than casual devotion.

At their first interview, he had artlessly confirmed what she already believed: that John Green, the news vendor, and John Doran, the multimillionaire, were one, and from him she had gradually wormed the entire explanation for his strange behavior.

She had liked John Green very much during the first months of their acquaintance, admired his reticence about his personal affairs and assumed that he was in comfortable circumstances, though not wealthy.

It happened that her maid had drifted into the Yellow Shop only a block away and saw John Green selling a bottle of perfume to an actress. Naturally, she hastened to inform her mistress, which caused Dorothy to fly into a rage and kick furniture about. She felt deeply humiliated at having been deceived by the fellow, at her own lack of discrimination in having accepted a cheap tradesman as a person fit for her companionship. She had summoned him

imperiously to her apartment and took her anger out on him as has been explained.

Several weeks later, she was at a dinner party and happened to sit next to a visitor from Chicago. After several commonplaces he remarked casually:

"It's a pleasure to meet you, but it is not the first time I have seen you. Some months ago I was in New York and sat at a table near which you happened to be dining with an acquaintance of mine named Doran."

"You are mistaken," said Dorothy. "I do not know any such person."

"In your profession you meet so many people, but I am not mistaken, because I bowed to him and he recognized me. It was John Doran, head of the Doran Corporation, one of the biggest mail order houses in America."

"Perhaps you are right. I have a frightful memory for names," said the English girl. "What does he look like?"

Her dinner partner described him well enough so that Dorothy recognized John Green.

"I think I do remember him, now that you mention it. I had forgotten."

"Is he in New York now? There has been a lot of gossip about his reason for leaving Chicago. They say he was disappointed in love. I know he used to take a young acquaintance of mine, a Miss Mainwaring, about, and suddenly stopped seeing her. I understand she is engaged to be married to some one else."

Dorothy did a little thinking during the rest of the evening, and when she got home, ordered her maid to bring out a small trunk packed with odds and ends.

She went through the trunk carefully, and at the bottom found what she was seeking, a photograph of John Doran, given her six months before by Lady Concannon.

The girl had glanced casually at the picture, but it had made no impression at the time, and Green's personality had not recalled it to her. But now that he seemed to be identified with Doran, there was no question of the likeness in her mind.

As she had frankly told John in the beginning, Lady Dorothy needed a rich American husband, preferably, but not necessarily, an attractive one.

Her brother would inherit the title, and any property which her thriftless father succeeded in leaving on his demise. Her own income was so small as to be indistinguishable, and her debts were legion.

The American dancing contract had been offered at a time when she was in despair, but she was clever enough to realize that she would not be more than a fad if she succeed at all, since nobody knew better than she that she was not a remarkable dancer. She was candidly predatory, a female variety of the English fortune hunter of romance and melodrama.

John Green was either crazy or wildly romantic, probably the latter, as he had given no sign of insanity during their association, and as the ownership of a tiny shop could be accounted for on no other grounds.

This multimillionaire was seeking her hand under an assumed name because he wanted to be loved for himself alone; had he not haunted her for three or four months? He was a most desirable catch, and she had made the error of abusing him and driving him away because she thought he was poor. It might not be too late to get him back. If he was still running the shop, she would find him, apologize and try to resume the friendship on the old footing—object, matrimony.

She would play his game, show him that the daughter of an earl was not too proud to pal with a poor but honest tradesman, and all that sort of rot.

When he had proposed and she had accepted him, he would break the news to her that he was a person of great wealth, and he would believe all his life that he had won her on his own merits. That would be rather nice; she would hate to have her husband think she was mercenary. Much better to be on romantic terms. She liked him anyway.

That was how it happened that John had found her in the Yellow Shop on the occasion when he came near having a quarrel with Elsie. No male person could have been blamed for assuming that she liked him so much she had sought him out despite the difference in their class and being a bit set up about it. Elsie, with the X-ray vision of

a woman in love gazing at a rival, had seen through Lady Dorothy, scrutinized her soul, and diagnosed it correctly, but she was completely out of the know and could give nothing but a woman's reason for her doubt that the English girl was attracted to John for himself alone.

However, Lady Dorothy had to be sure. It would never do to bring things to a head with John Doran, alias Green, while there was the slightest doubt that he might not actually be Doran, or, if he were, that he had not gone bankrupt and was beginning again at the bottom.

That was why she had persuaded him to give her a letter of introduction to some one in Chicago. He had written a letter to Standish Jones because he relied on his discretion, but he did not realize the potency of a scheming beauty upon an elderly man unused to that kind of feminine attention.

Dorothy was now in possession of all the facts. She knew about the bet, she had a line on the possessions of her victim which were being managed by Jones, and she was quite convinced that the time had come to spring her trap. Somebody else might get Doran; perhaps that pretty little minx associated with him in the Yellow Shop.

She had written him every four or five days, letters which gradually increased in warmth, and received replies much less frequently which were models of clever non-committals. Doran had been a business man so long that he was guarded in correspondence from habit.

Now the time had come when she could write him that she would be in New York for a week and longed intently to see him.

"Do you remember how you kissed me when I left New York?" she wrote. "I knew then how you felt about me, but the wretched train had to start. I am looking forward to resuming that delightful conversation."

As a matter of fact, it was Dorothy who had kissed John, but, by this time, he supposed that it was the other way around, and, when he read these lines, he tingled inside. Part of him was wary fox, long trained in avoiding entanglements, and part simply rabbit, ready to walk up and be bagged.

Speaking of bags, John's cat was now out of the bag with Terhune also. A few days after the collapse of his ridiculous plan to eliminate Doran, that faithless general manager had evolved a method by which he could loot the Doran Corporation in a perfectly legal fashion, at the very extreme condemnation of only a breach of trust, but it required considerable time, and time was what he was not guaranteed. He was aware that Doran's private affairs were in the hands of Standish Jones, and he decided to talk turkey with that official.

Jones had no reason to distrust Terhune. He did not admire what he had learned of his methods of managing the corporation, but that was not his affair. He knew that Doran trusted him implicitly. When Terhune came into his office and demanded a conference, he granted it gladly.

"I am very much alarmed about Doran," Terhune began. "There's something wrong with him, and I wonder if you are acquainted with any facts that should be in my possession."

"What do you want to know? I'll tell you anything in reason."

"Are you aware that he didn't go abroad, that he is in New York and living under an alias?"

"John Green, eh?"

"Exactly. What's the idea?"

Jones laughed. "Do you know what he is doing?"

"No."

"Well, I'll tell you. John Green is running a little news and stationery shop. He works about twelve hours a day selling papers and magazines and what not."

Terhune looked astounded. It was news to him.

"If that's a fact, the man is crazy and needs a guardian."

"No, he's not crazy; foolish, I grant you, but perfectly sane."

"What's he doing it for? Here the company is at sixes and sevens, I have to make decisions that ought to be up to him, I haven't his address, am forbidden to communicate with him, and I can't take the attitude that I am in charge for a long time or a short time. Do you know what that means. I'm just *locum tenens*."

"I get you," said Jones, seriously. "I think he expects you to go ahead and use your own judgment."

"How long is he going to be away?"

"It depends. It may be five years, or it may be a few months."

"You seem to know a lot. Any reason why you shouldn't tell me?"

"I don't know, but you ought to be informed under the circumstances. You are in an uncomfortable position. Now be prepared to fall out of your chair. Doran bet me a million to a hundred thousand that he could go to New York, with only fifteen hundred dollars to his name, and in five years or less, come back with a brand new business worth fifty thousand a year. He had the bug that he wanted to begin life all over again."

"The poor sap," exclaimed Terhune, a great light breaking upon him. "He can't touch a dollar of the corporation's money, he can't use his own name for credit, he's got to do it all on his own."

"That's it."

"Who does he think he is, Julius Caesar or Napoleon? Why, nobody could do a thing like that."

"A young lady friend of mine who knew him as Green in New York tells me he has made a good start. All a fellow with his brains needs is a start. I wouldn't be surprised if he nicked me for the hundred thousand."

"I'm infinitely obliged to you, Mr. Jones. You may rely on me to keep the secret. It makes my road perfectly clear."

"Glad to be of service. How's the company getting along?"

"Pretty good. We had a tough time during this depression, but things are on the mend."

"Well, Doran won't bother you. He has implicit confidence in you."

Terhune had the grace to blush, shook hands and went away. So all his fears regarding Doran's evil intentions toward himself were unfounded. The man was just a nut. Well, he was glad he hadn't stained his hands. After all, Doran had meant to be good to him. But he had no business concealing his plans from his executive.

He was responsible for a horrible period,

and now Terhune was in a position where he saw himself enormously wealthy with no risk if he had a little time.

Time! Doran would stay away four years more if he hadn't established a business worth fifty thousand a year in the meantime. Perhaps Terhune could fix it so he would not establish that business. If Doran stayed away another year, it was all the time that was needed to put through the big plan.

The upshot of his cogitations was that he took a train for New York next day, and for two or three days lurked about the vicinity of the New Yellow Shop into which John Green and Elsie Evans had just moved. Then he made certain calls in the business district, and went back to Chicago. It was dividend period, and for the third time he drew on the surplus to pay the quarterly dividend of three per cent. He was now very nearly in possession of his stock, clear and free.

CHAPTER XIX.

A COMPETITOR.

THE New Yellow Shop had been open only a few days when John observed, across the street, in a fairly modern building, the hasty exit of a dressmaking establishment which occupied a fairly large store on the ground floor.

A large force of workmen entered, and signs of business preparations went on apace. Presently the front of the shop was painted a bright pink, and a large sign placed above the door and window which read: "The Pink Shop—Strictly Co-operative."

"Somebody is trying to steal our stuff," he told Elsie. "I don't mind the pink part of it, but what the deuce do they mean by strictly coöperative?"

In about a week he found out, for the Pink Shop blossomed with the same sort of stock as the Yellow Shop, save that there was a greater variety of goods, and more richness and elegance in the fittings.

"We can't stand competition," Elsie wailed. "There surely isn't enough business for two such places on this street."

"We can stand it better than they can," he replied. "They pay twice our rent, have spent three times as much on fittings and carry a much more expensive stock. I'm going over to buy something."

He purchased a couple of magazines for fifty cents and was surprised to receive a pink ticket which read:

This ticket entitles you to a share in the profits. Present all tickets received by you for purchases the first day of every month and receive ten per cent of the total value in cash.

"Does this apply to magazines and newspapers?" he demanded.

"Anything for sale in our store," said the smiling and attractive young woman who waited on him.

John slowly and thoughtfully returned to his own shop, slipped into the tiny office at the rear and began to do some figuring.

"What's the trouble, Mr. Green?" demanded Elsie, who had seen him come out of the place across the street and recognized the look of worry on his forehead.

"There's a very large nigger in the woodpile," he said. "I'm trying to dope it out. These people are giving all customers cash rebate tickets worth ten per cent. They even allow it on magazines and newspapers, which is a technical violation of the agreement by which we sell these articles at the established price."

"You saw how quickly that dressmaker went out. That means they bought her lease, and probably found her a place somewhere else. They painted the shop pink, which means they are shooting at us. Elsie, send those two girls over to buy three or four articles we are selling. Let's have a showdown."

The salesgirls were back in ten minutes with their purchases, and laid down their rebate tickets. They had bought hair nets, silk stockings, and an alarm clock. In every case they had paid only what the articles cost the Yellow Shop.

"They are selling their stock at cost," John declared. "And these rebate tickets mean that they are selling it at ten per cent below cost. That place is a spite store, set up to put us out of business. They have an overhead of a thousand dollars a

month, they are taking a loss of ten per cent on everything they sell, which means two or three thousand dollars a month or more. If they stay there a year they will drop fifty or sixty thousand dollars, and we shall be out of business."

"But why?" asked Elsie in tears. "We never did anybody any harm. What makes them want to injure us?"

"Search me."

"Oh, Mr. Green, do you suppose it is that Mr. Meehan whom you forced to buy your option?"

"Not a bit of it. He's a business man."

"Then that Rothstein who bought up your bills?"

"He's a more businesslike business man than Meehan. Ordinary competition we could fight, but this concern will operate at a big loss to put us on the rocks. There is some force behind it that we don't know anything about, but I'm going to find out. In the meantime, get rid of your two salesgirls."

"You and I are going to be able to handle all the business we are going to get. Back we go on our strict economy system of living. We'll draw nothing except absolute expenses. Fortunately we have a war chest this fellow probably doesn't know about."

"Hadn't we better retire from business now and start somewhere else?" she said, tearfully.

"Whoever my enemy is, he will probably follow wherever I go. I'm going to give him the fight of his life right here and beat him."

"But how?"

"I don't know yet. I only just found out about it. Listen to that customer out there telling the girl he can buy Bruno Cigarettes across the street for eleven cents a package, and we are asking fifteen. We'll have a lot of that and lose most of our trade."

"And we were getting along so nicely," she sighed.

"Things were coming too easily. This life is a constant fight."

John was too wise a business man not to appreciate exactly what he was up against. Freezing out a small competitor is an old

game favored chiefly by chain stores, and trusts which sell directly to the consumer through their own string of outlets.

The practice is to open up opposite the victim, or directly alongside of him, and undersell him. Each time he cuts his prices the strangler cuts below him, until the small storekeeper is finally selling at cost. Then the agent of the octopus begins to sell below cost and the battle is over.

The Pink Store, however, seemed to be an independent affair, not connected with any of the big strings of retail shops. It had invaded a quiet block where there seemed little prospect for trade, except for the sort of business built up by the personality and salesmanship of John and Elsie, and had begun immediately to offer goods below wholesale prices.

"Somebody is willing to lose about fifty thousand dollars to ruin me," said John at length. "He expects me to play the usual game of trying to meet his prices. If he is willing to drop two or three times fifty thousand dollars in this spite store he can put us out of business all right, but I am going to show him a new trick."

"What can you do?" asked Elsie hopelessly. Before her eyes the sweet future she had visioned was shattered and broken, Alicia's prospects dimmed, John Green and herself turned out penniless and in despair.

"Listen, Elsie. This fellow loses money on every customer he gets. I'm going to make him lose a lot of money. We are not going to cut prices, we go on selling as usual and get in something toward our expenses. In the meantime I'm going to make the Pink Shop help meet our deficit. Mrs. Cohen has a lot of friends, hasn't she?"

"About a hundred relatives. They would do anything for me."

"We'll use them and everybody else we know. Here's the game. They are selling standard goods ten per cent below whole-sale, including the coöperative tickets. I am going to be their best customer. I am going to clean them out of a lot of easy selling lines."

"But you are giving them our money. What shall we do with the goods? We won't be able to sell what we've got."

"Here's where I come in. I take their goods out and sell them to stores all over the district at five per cent below what they pay the wholesaler for the same goods. I make five per cent. If somebody came in here and offered me standard quality No-hole silk stockings for five per cent less than what the wholesaler charges me, wouldn't I buy them?"

"Yes."

"All right. So will everybody else. I want to buy about five or six hundred dollars' worth of their goods every day. I'll sell it at a profit of twenty-five to thirty dollars. You beat it uptown and organize the purchasers. Tell them the kind of things to buy and give them the cash. Have them deliver the goods at your flat. Start in first thing in the morning."

Bright and early next morning a heterogeneous collection of purchasers descended upon the Pink Shop. They bought right and left and heavily of the sort of goods that move fastest. By noon the Pink Shop was out of half a dozen lines and would-be purchasers, authentic ones, crossed the street and paid regular prices at the Yellow Shop.

During the afternoon John went out and had little trouble in getting orders from small shopkeepers. He had hired a small Ford and made immediate deliveries, an advantage in many cases. Some of the shopkeepers supposed they were buying stolen goods, but they examined the material carefully and purchased.

The manager of the Pink Shop, a smooth, alert young fellow named Williamson, reported the first night to his employer, a commission merchant in the Woolworth Building, that he had got rid of nearly a thousand dollars' worth of goods that day.

"I think we've prevented the Yellow Shop from making a sale," he said jubilantly.

"Considering we are giving the stuff away I am not surprised," said the employer. "However, those are the instructions, and we should worry."

But Williamson did worry, for the horde of customers descended upon him every morning, and by noon the store was bare of most of the things for which legiti-

mate customers entered. Williamson recognized the visitors after a day or two. They were the same faces, and he questioned a woman, who happened to be Mrs. Cohen in person.

"You've been coming in here every day, buying thirty or forty dollars' worth of goods. What do you do with them?" he demanded.

"I buy them for the cooperative tickets," she said blandly.

"Yes, but how can you use so much stuff?"

"I have a large family," she smiled.

Mrs. Cohen had entered into the contest with the greatest enthusiasm, and enlisted a score of friends who had their mornings free. In a couple of days some of these friends had informed their husbands or brothers who were in business of the graft, and they rushed in and began to buy for their own establishments.

At the end of a week John Green had made about a hundred and twenty-five dollars above expenses, and the Yellow Shop was losing only eight or ten dollars a day.

"Lots of people tell me they have been to the Pink Shop, but it never seems to have anything they want," Elsie told John triumphantly.

"Well, don't get too joyous about it, because this state of affairs can't last long."

He spoke truly, for he was arrested in his Ford by a plainclothes man the very next day, and brought to police headquarters to be questioned. As he had anticipated that some of the shopkeepers would tell the wholesalers and their goods were being offered under wholesale prices, he had fortified himself with sales slips and tickets from the Pink Shop to prove ownership, and these he exhibited to the police lieutenant who was backed by the presence of the representative of the wholesalers' association.

"You can't tell me that you buy these goods at a retail shop cheaper than we sell them wholesale," said the representative.

"Here are the sales slips to prove it."

"Those people must be crazy."

"That's not my affair."

"Well, you can't go on peddling our goods under established prices."

"I appeal to you, lieutenant, if I haven't

a right to buy goods and sell them without dictation from this individual."

"You certainly have," said the policeman. "Since you have proved you are not stealing them, step to it."

"Look here," said the wholesaler. "I'll take what goods you have off your hands at the price you are selling them for, and I assure you that I'll take steps to prevent this Pink Shop from securing any more stock unless they agree to quit selling at less than cost. Why, it is ruinous to legitimate business."

"That's agreeable to me. I own the Yellow Shop on the same street, and they are doing this to put me out of business. I simply double crossed them."

"It was a darn smart trick," said the wholesaler. "But I can't prevent their selling ordinary goods at cost, and when they put up their prices, this stunt of yours is done for."

"I'll think of another," laughed John. "I'll agree to be good on one condition. Otherwise, I continue peddling."

"What is it?"

"That you find out for me who is behind this Pink Shop. I want to identify my enemy. I don't want to know the agent, I want to know whose money is responsible for this attempt to put me out of business."

"Well," said the wholesaler, "it isn't usual, but we have ways of finding out such things, and I'll undertake to get you that information."

John turned over his unsold stock, the man agreed to take what his buying gang had purchased that day, gave him a check, and he returned to the Yellow Shop.

Late in the afternoon Williamson was ordered by telephone to boost prices ten per cent all along the line. Thus ended the curious incident of the unprofitable customers.

John had some three thousand dollars' worth of ten per cent rebate tickets, which when cashed, would put him about one hundred and fifty dollars ahead as a result of his trick.

"We beat them badly during the past ten days," he told Elsie, "but the battle has only just started. Even with their increase in price they can undersell us from

ten to forty per cent, depending on the stuff."

"Can't we get the news companies to make them stop issuing rebate tickets on magazines and newspapers?" she inquired. "It really means that they are selling below the established prices."

"I doubt it. So long as they sell a magazine for its regular price, the news companies can't object to the store sharing its profits at the end of each month."

"Then we ought to cut prices a little, don't you think?"

"Won't do us any good. They can always undersell us. I wouldn't be surprised if we smoked out some kind of offer as a result of the past week's work. They must have some object in going after us. You see, I don't think I can have an enemy in New York, because I am a comparative stranger here, and certainly no one who has thousands of dollars to waste simply to keep me from making a living."

"Then we are to sit still and see our business go across the street?"

"Until I can think of something else. I'm all worn out from that peddling job. We've got thirty thousand dollars' assets between us. If we can make this place come anywhere near paying expenses we can exist for three or four years. That fellow will stick it out six months and then either go out of business or become a regular store, in which case we can put him out of business. Batten down the hatches, make everything tight, and we'll weather the storm."

It was sad work, during the next few weeks, sitting in an empty store seeing their regular trade radiate to the alluring bargains of the Pink Shop. John put a sign in the window offering to cash the Pink Shop's rebate slips at once for half price, and this brought in a surprising number of people who would rather get money at once than carry the tickets around for weeks before dividend day.

The sign brought over Williamson, red of face and indignant. It happened that John was out, and Elsie met him.

"I demand that you take that sign out of your window at once," he blustered. "It's unprofessional to butt into another man's business."

"And do you call it professional to try to ruin people who never do you any harm by opening a store opposite and selling goods below what they cost you?" she retorted with spirit.

"That's business," he retorted, but with a change of manner. Elsie's beauty had its effect upon him, and, being a capable young manager, he did not entirely relish the sort of work he was doing.

"So is this," said Elsie. "It's surprising how many people prefer our cash to your promises."

"I can refuse to cash tickets bought by speculators."

"Then we'll take you into court and make you cash them."

"Well, then I'll start cashing them when the purchase is made."

"Ah," smiled Elsie, "if you do that then I'll have to take the sign out."

This was the second change in policy of the Pink Store caused by the aggressive methods of the Yellow Shop.

"These people will take a lot of licking," Williamson reported to his employer that night. "They are on the job every minute."

"We'll lick 'em," said the commission man. "We've got the dough."

CHAPTER XX.

INSIDE INFORMATION.

ABOUT two weeks after the experience with the police lieutenant and the representative of the wholesalers, the latter strolled into the Yellow Shop and happened to find the proprietor on the job.

"Thought I had forgotten the promise I made you?" he said with a smile, as he shook hands with John Green.

"I supposed you hadn't been able to find out anything."

"We have ways," he said significantly. "We've been looking into the situation on this street, and you have our hearty sympathy. Trying to put a competitor out of business by selling at cost is a dirty game, and wholesalers are strongly against it. Of course the manufacturers who don't use

wholesalers are doing it all the time through their chain stores."

"You haven't gone so far as to refuse to sell to that fellow across the street?"

"Well, no, we can't do that, you know, but we sympathize with you and hope you win your fight."

"Thanks," said John dryly.

"Now the facts are," said the representative as he settled himself in John's private office, "that a man named Murchison, a commission merchant, is buying the stock for that store and putting up the money for operating it."

"Never heard of him. There is somebody behind him."

"He says no, that is his own enterprise; that if he can eliminate competition he will build up a fine legitimate business in this neighborhood."

"Bunk! A store as big as that would go broke with or without any competition."

"Well, he's got a right to his opinion. Now, I am not speaking for the association, mind you, but privately and confidentially, I happened to see a big check for goods go through my own firm, and the check was indorsed by Murchison. It was made out to him by the Doran Corporation."

John Green leaped from his chair as though a nail had penetrated into him.

"What?" he exclaimed. "The Doran Corporation? Are you sure?"

"When you get a check from the Doran Corporation you know it."

"And what was the signature—the auditor's?"

"No, this one was signed by old Terhune himself."

"But it is strictly against the policy of the Doran Corporation to operate stores. It sells by mail or direct to retailers."

"That's all I know. But the Pink Shop gets a lot of goods from the Doran Corporation. This might be an independent venture of Terhune's."

"It was a corporation check, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"I certainly am very much obliged to you. I know that you have demonstrated friendship in giving me this information. Such things are usually not revealed."

"Well, you made a hit with me by your pluck. That peddling stunt was a wonderful piece of work, and it must have raised hell with them. I hate to see a decent fellow butt his head against the wall, and if you are up against the Doran Corporation you might as well quit now. They've got millions."

"I know it," said John rather whimsically.

His visitor departed, leaving him in a queer frame of mind. So it seemed that he was in competition with himself, and he was competing so unfairly that he was liable to put himself out of business if he didn't make himself reform.

Now what in the devil was he going to do? How did it happen that the Doran Corporation had singled out John Green in a little side street in New York for vicious extinction?

He had smelled an enemy in the appearance of the Pink Shop; his enemy was revealed to be his own huge company, and his own money was being used to smash him.

This meant that the identity of John Green was known in Chicago, and somebody to whose interest it was to keep him from succeeding had gone about it in this way.

Now, who was the individual interested in putting John Doran, alias Green, out of his little business? Terhune was supposed not to know of his whereabouts, and Terhune was so much his creature that he would be the last person to take an inimical step against him. Yet Terhune was signing corporation checks financing Murchison in his Pink Shop.

There was a person in Chicago who hoped he would not succeed. It was the man who stood to win a million if he didn't—Standish Jones. Jones would have to pay a hundred thousand dollars if Doran returned successful. There was nothing in their agreement to prevent Jones from taking steps to injure his affairs in New York, because it simply had not occurred to him that Jones would be so poor a sport as to try such a thing.

Jones was trustee of all Doran's interests, his strong personal friend, an honest, upright man, and he knew that Doran would

loan him the hundred thousand dollars to pay the bet if he didn't have it, or scratch it at his request. He was pretty sure it was not Jones.

If Jones did this thing, it was unlikely that he would have taken Terhune into his confidence or used the Doran Corporation money to give him cutthroat opposition.

Now about Terhune. Here was a man who owed him a great debt of gratitude, who was bound to him by long service, who stood to win a big fortune by loyalty and faithfulness. What had he to gain by injuring his employer?

Well, it is a sad fact that human beings are less grateful than dogs; that men are more apt to feel kindly toward those who favor them than toward those whom they favor. Terhune was in charge of the Doran Corporation; probably things did not progress as well under his management as Doran had hoped; the depression had injured sales.

Was it possible that Terhune, who knew the bulldog character of Doran, wished to keep him from a quick success, figuring on making a big private clean-up during his absence? This presupposed that Terhune was a crook, and also that he knew of Doran's whereabouts and the details of the bet. Before proceeding further on the hypothesis that his general manager was trying to injure him, he would have to find out about these things.

He wrote out a telegram to Standish Jones, which read as follows:

Does Terhune know what I am doing, and have you acquainted him with the facts regarding the bet? Wire reply, but on no account inform him of my inquiry.

He sent off the telegram, and then went out and looked through the window of the opposition store. He saw Williamson glaring at him, and he grinned maliciously.

What would that fellow say if he knew the man he was trying to ruin was the man who owned his store and paid him his salary?

He could do nothing until he heard from Jones, and even then his course was doubtful. With a word he could close the Pink Shop, but that word would be making use

of the credit of John Doran—something he had agreed not to do.

The reply from Jones arrived next morning. Evidently the banker had left his office too late to get the message the day before. It was completely significant.

Terhune came to me, demanded to know where you were and why you were in New York under assumed name. Thought it best to tell him of bet because he might have thought you were crazy. Regards. Hope you lose.
JONES.

So Terhune was in the know, which meant that he was crooked and evilly disposed. In good time he would be taken care of. There was no question that he was deliberately trying to ruin John Green and was fully acquainted with his identity.

While he was deliberating his course Elsie came to him with red cheeks.

"Mr. Green, what do you suppose! Those people across the street have had the impudence to make me an offer. They want me to leave you and manage the Pink Shop. Mr. Williamson said he was instructed to resign in my favor, and that they would pay me a hundred dollars a week."

"What did you tell them?"

"I said most certainly not."

John smiled at her brightly. "Of course they don't know you are my partner. They have heard how clever you are, and think I cannot survive your loss. Now I've got an idea. You accept that job."

"What?"

"Sure. Only, demand a hundred and fifty per week. No sane concern would pay a manager such a salary, but these people will, because their object in life is to cripple me."

"I am not going to leave you. I am your partner."

"Of course you are my partner—a silent partner. This shop will lost money while that place is in existence. But our overhead is only about two fifty a week. We'll take in at least a hundred dollars a week under the worst conditions. The scheme is to make the Pink Shop pay our deficit. You turn over a hundred per week to the Yellow Shop and keep fifty for yourself."

Her eyes danced as she caught the idea, but she demurred.

"Is it honest?"

"Certainly not, but do you call the Pink Shop honest? They are out to do us. You go over there and mismanage the joint. Keep running out of stock. Get a lot of rude clerks, drive trade away. With what they are paying you and what we take in here they can't put us out of business in a hundred years. You keep out of sight. Don't wait on customers yourself."

"It would be fun to fool them, the beasts!" she said.

"Something is going to drop on them they don't expect pretty soon, but in the meantime you join them. What a nice little present you are going to be. Go over now and state your terms. Williamson will refuse them, but his boss down town will order him to take you on any terms."

"It will be terrible not to be in the Yellow Shop."

"Think how much good you will be doing us. Could we net a hundred a week any other way? That's equivalent to selling two hundred and fifty to three hundred dollars' worth of goods. On your way, Elsie."

She smiled reluctantly and departed, while John reconsidered the case of Terhune. What was the fellow up to? What did he want? Was there any way he could get control of the company or lay his personal hands on the surplus?

The Pink Shop was directed at Doran, not an unknown shopkeeper named Green. It would be legitimate for him to wire Terhune to close it at once, and it would be closed.

If he sent such a wire to Terhune, it would mean that the general manager would understand that his plot had been discovered; that Doran knew he was responsible for the persecution, and of course distrust-ed him.

He would have to go back to Chicago and discipline the man at once before he did the company some serious damage. This would be the abandonment of his own enterprise, since he could not don and doff the character of Doran at will. Far better to get a line on what Terhune was doing,

give him plenty of rope, and in the mean-time keep on with the New York fight.

He loved the idea of Elsie misdirecting the Pink Shop, and of Terhune blunderingly supporting the store he hoped to ruin. Evidently Terhune needed a lot of time for whatever scheme he was trying to put through; he wanted him to go broke so that he would have to start all over again and waste years before he reassumed control of the Doran Corporation.

A month or so of leeway would do the corporation no great harm, and now that he was aware of the hostility of Terhune he would like to see what else the scoundrel could contrive.

Elsie was back from her visit across the street. She was a bit peeved at John's willingness to part with her, and yet had to admit the wisdom of the move.

"He refused my proposition, as you expected," she told him.

"You'll be hired this afternoon. It's lucky I moved out of your furnished room several weeks ago. They can't suspect us of conniving."

"I presume you foresaw this situation," she said, a bit huffily. She had not quite forgiven him for moving, and felt that she could thank Mrs. Cohen's tactlessness for his action.

"I don't see how I can deliberately injure business in a place that is paying me a salary," she added.

"Don't do it. I shouldn't have suggested it. Just draw the salary—that will be help enough."

CHAPTER XXI.

SCAREHEAD PUBLICITY.

LADY DOROTHY had wired John to meet her at the station, and he was there, in company with three photographers and four reporters. During her absence in the West the New York Sunday newspapers had been given time to come out with their magazine features prepared six weeks ahead, and these were filled with photographs of this most dazzling of British blondes in all sorts of poses and costumes, from fur coats which concealed all but the

tip of her nose, to dancing rigs which hardly concealed anything; on the contrary, proved that the theory that English girls might be beautiful but had bad figures was malicious fiction.

Lady Dorothy had become a celebrity, and no mistake. News stories of lavish parties given in her honor by millionaires had filtered into New York, and lost nothing on the wires. New York, which had been a trifle cold to her upon her debut, was now prepared to greet her with great warmth. Such is the power of advertising.

She came from the train with her arms full of flowers and followed by her maid and three porters, one of them leading a ferocious white British bulldog, bought in Chicago.

John remembered with remorse that he had not purchased any floral tribute for her, but he saw he was forgiven by the fetching smile she shot at him while she bowed to the reporters and graciously consented to walk to one side, where the light was better, to be photographed.

"Hello, John dear," she trilled to him, loudly and clearly. "It was sweet of you to meet the train. Just let me have a few minutes with these nice newspaper men and I'll be ready to go along."

As Lady Dorothy had turned her back on the reporters, been curt to their questions, and objected to being snapshotted when she landed from England, it was plain to be seen that she had learned a lot about how to get along in the U. S. A. during her trip to the West.

"Who's the gentleman who is here to meet you?" demanded one of the reporters, alert for a human interest story.

"A very dear friend of mine, Mr. John Green," she replied, with meaning.

"But who is he? What's he do? A New Yorker?"

"He is in business in New York."

"Are you engaged?" demanded the second reporter, with astounding lack of delicacy.

"Fi, fi! How can you be so inquisitive?" smiled Lady Dorothy.

"You don't deny it?" admonished a third.

"One would have to be busy in America

denying everything that appeared in newspapers."

A reporter immediately darted to the side of John Green.

"May I ask what business you are in, Mr. Green, and what is your address?"

"I don't see that it concerns you in the least," said John insolently. He had been standing apart and had heard none of the interview with Lady Dorothy.

"All ready, John," called Dorothy. "Take me to a taxi."

The reporters clustered, and compared notes. They had been sent for a perfunctory little story about the arrival of the British noblewoman, and here was a whale of a yarn; the dancing aristocrat practically admitted that she was engaged to John Green, a New York business man.

As John handed her into a taxi, he was surprised to see two photographers rush up and turn their Graflex cameras, not on Dorothy, but upon himself.

"Hey, what's the idea? Quit that!" he growled.

"Oh, don't mind the boys," said Dorothy from the interior of the taxi. "They have to earn their living."

"You're all right, lady," shouted a photographer, a swarthy impudent youth with a green cap and one front tooth missing. "Come on out for a minute and pose with your arm around the guy's neck."

"Hotel Vigo," said John to the chauffeur. "Get started."

"What in the devil did they want you to do that for?" he asked indignantly as the car started.

Dorothy laughed tunefully. "I am afraid it was indiscreet for me to have you meet me. The children immediately jumped to the conclusion that we were engaged."

"That would be a story," he said grimly. "The daughter of a British earl engaged to a newspaper vendor!"

"How is the celebrated Yellow Shop?" she asked, tactfully veering the conversation.

"I'm having my troubles just at present, but I'm better off than I was when you went to Chicago. I pulled off one profitable deal."

"And that lovely Mrs. Evans—is she still with you?"

"No; she has gone to an opposition shop across the street. These business affairs can't interest you."

"On the contrary, anything that you are doing interests me; foolish man."

They were at the Vigo, and she drew him in with her.

"You must dine with me, and I'm not going to let you go until after dinner. It won't take me ten minutes to change my gown."

"Then I'll telephone to the shop and have my assistant send out for her dinner."

The dinner was a pleasant affair; Lady Dorothy was full of her Chicago experiences, babbled on in her amusing cynical fashion, flirted with him skillfully, and by the end of the meal had him pretty completely infatuated.

He went back to the shop a bit impatient with the whole absurd arrangement which kept him from appearing in his proper person, and tied a big man of affairs to a pitiful picayune little shop which wasn't doing much business.

For some days, he had not seen Elsie except to talk with her over the telephone, and he had been missing her cheerful companionship to a surprising degree. The shop with Elsie in it was one thing, and tending store with a stupid girl assistant was quite another, especially since business had definitely shifted across the street. He closed an hour earlier that night, and went home considerably disgruntled.

Elsie had taken charge of the Pink Shop and had said good-by to Williamson, who had left at the end of a week. The fatuousness with which they had engaged her and the completeness of their trust in her was astonishing; but not hard to understand from Murchison's standpoint.

He had struck a death blow at Green by engaging the beautiful and clever manager of the Yellow Shop, and he assumed she would give him the same kind of service that she had given Green.

It seemed to her that she owed them her best services and it really made no difference how much or how little business the

shop did since it lost money on every sale made. She needed a male clerk in the shop, since the departure of the former manager, and she engaged one through an advertisement in a newspaper.

He was a good-looking, rather superior sort of person, not the kind of man ordinarily to be secured for twenty dollars per week. It was rather remarkable that she got Chester Fletcher, because he was the former auditor of the Doran Corporation, Spencer Fleetwood.

Fleetwood had spent a horrible month or six weeks. Besides the fear of pursuit, his conscience had begun to trouble him about Doran.

If it hadn't been for his own change of heart, Doran would now be in his grave, and why wasn't it possible that Terhune would make some other attempt upon the life of the man he hated?

Fleetwood was apparently immune from pursuit, but any chance of rehabilitation he might get would have to come through Doran. Now that the engagement with Georgia Mainwaring was broken, Doran could not have any animosity toward him, and if it chanced that he could be of service to the president of the corporation, perhaps he might give him another chance to make good.

It might be that he could do some big service for Doran, win his gratitude in some way, and he owed it to himself to see that no other assassin took his life.

So for a week or so Fleetwood had been lurking about the neighborhood. He had been bold enough to enter the Yellow Shop to ask for a job, but Green was not hiring anybody. Then he had seen an advertisement of the Pink Shop across the street, and he was the first applicant.

He recognized the beautiful girl who engaged him as the one he had followed, and who led him to the Yellow Shop so many weeks ago, and the prospect of being near her and becoming friends appealed to the very lonely young fellow. Thus it happened that Fleetwood, the defaulter, came again on Terhune's pay roll.

To be an employee of Doran's competitor seemed the next best thing to be working for Doran. He might make the man's ac-

quaintance, and if he could manage to convey to him the perfidy of Terhune without incriminating himself, it would be worth something. Mrs. Evans might still be on speaking terms with her late employer; if he became friendly with her, he might reach him through her.

It was Fleetwood, or Fletcher, as he called himself, who first saw the big story in the morning papers of the engagement of Lady Dorothy Devon to John Green.

The rewrite men on the newspapers had been careful not to make an official announcement. They got around it by saying that the rumor which had it that an engagement would soon be announced was verified by the meeting between John Green and the English aristocrat at the Grand Central; that she had been taxed with it and had refused to deny it; that they both had posed for pictures and driven off together. With the stories were huge cuts of Lady Dorothy and John Green, which the art departments had ingeniously placed side by side. It was about as convincing as a story could be.

Fletcher took one of the papers to Mrs. Evans.

"Your late employer is flying high," he said, significantly. "Think of the proprietor of a little den like that and such a woman."

"Whatever are you talking about?" asked Elsie petulantly.

"Take a look." He extended to her the newspaper which had a four-column cut of the pair and a screaming headline on the front page.

Elsie looked and her heart stood still for a second. She grew deadly pale, put her hand to her breast, but bravely recovered and read the article through.

"She isn't half good enough for him," she said, calmly. To her, the thing was definite and complete. The little dream which she had been fostering for so long was nothing but a dream.

Everything was over. What good was the Yellow Shop partnership, the nest egg in the bank, the management of this store? What good was anything?

This yellow-haired Englishwoman had captured her man, the dear person by whose

side she had been fighting, who had lived in her house, whose affairs seemed wrapped up with her own future so thoroughly.

"What do you suppose made a high-flying dame like that fall for him?" continued Fleetwood. "He's forty if he's a day. He isn't anything wonderful to look at. And believe me, his business is on the rocks."

"You stop abusing Mr. Green," said Elsie, indignantly. "You go back to your work and keep quiet."

He grinned at her, because her anger was so revealing.

"I believe you are stuck on him, if you are working for the opposition."

"You mind your own business," flashed Elsie.

"Now wait a minute. Maybe it is my business, and if that's the way you feel about him it might be worth while to listen to me."

"Well?"

"This Lady Dorothy is back from Chicago. Did you know he came from there?"

"Yes."

"She's an expensive girl, that one, and as wise as they make them, as you can tell by her picture. She isn't marrying a poor guy like this, you can bet your life. Women like that don't fall for a man unless they know he is well fixed."

"That's all you know about it."

"Yes? Well, this woman is on to him. She's found out all about him. The poor sap thinks she loves him for himself alone, but she has discovered he's worth about forty millions, and that's why she has grabbed him."

"I'll send out for a policeman," said Elsie. "You are stark, staring crazy."

"You've been working for him all this time and don't know who he is?"

"Who is he?" faltered Elsie.

"His name is John Doran, and he is the head of the Doran Corporation of Chicago."

"That's absurd! Why, he had all kinds of trouble with the Doran Corporation over a bill some months ago."

"Because he was supposed to be John Green, some little shopkeeper."

"And why should such a man be penniless in New York? I happen to know he was down to his last dollar at one time. He

rented a room in my apartment, and lived there several months. He ate in one-arm lunchrooms. Why should he do such things?"

"That's what I can't make out unless he's bats. But I know him, used to work for his company in Chicago and saw him a thousand times. I knew him the minute. I saw him in that shop over there."

"Whatever his motive is, you can be sure it's a good one," said Elsie, firmly. "But there is a mystery about him. I always felt it. I wonder why he is doing it?"

"Search me. Only this Lady Dorothy Devon knows her game. Some one in Chicago tipped her off, and she just naturally gobbled him."

"I'm afraid that is so," admitted Elsie. "I knew that woman was selfish and mercenary the first time I set eyes on her. You can't fool a woman about another woman."

She retired into her private office to get away from Fletcher, whom she disliked as one always does the harbinger of bad news. She sat motionless for an hour, looking into space, gazing down through the long gray years ahead of her.

Poor John! Some quixotic motive had brought him to New York to do the thing he had done. She could not blame him for being fascinated by this woman who had pursued him when it seemed that the only reason for such a pursuit was his own attractive personality. She must have known who he was from the first, deliberately set her cap for him and got him.

Elsie felt that she was vain, willful, heartless, cold, and probably vicious; she would make him desperately unhappy as his wife, for at bottom he was a simple, honest, unspoiled boy despite his possible forty-two years.

She would spend his fortune with both hands, lead him a dance that would break his heart. If there were only some way that she could spare him this cross!

Elsie understood now why he had always been so indifferent to her, so reserved, so casual. He considered her a being of a different class, a competent employee, a fit companion, perhaps, for the proprietor of a little shop, but naturally not to be considered as the wife of a multimillionaire.

John would marry a great lady, of course, but this woman was not his sort even if she did have a title and ancestry. How he must have worried the night Mrs. Cohen suggested that he marry Elsie Evans. He had packed up and moved out of the furnished room within a day or two, and she did not blame him. Such a man could not afford to be mixed up with a working girl.

But he had been miserably unfair to her, to expose her to his own charm and graciousness, to let her become acquainted with his fine character and manly strength, and not expect her to fall in love with him. Just because a man does not make love to a girl, that does not excuse him for giving her a companionship which kindles a passion in her heart. However, he was innocent in intention. Poor John! Poor Elsie!

CHAPTER XXII.

ENGAGED.

JOHN had discovered his happiness at about the same time that morning. He had glanced at the paper casually, and his own likeness and that of Lady Dorothy struck him in the eye.

Utterly unbelieving, he read the hysterical and sickening yarn written in the worst vein of sentimental slop. There were columns about the career of Lady Dorothy here and abroad, about the Russian prince, The Italian count and the English duke she was reported to have thrown over for a solid, substantial New York business man.

They had flopped regarding his identity, had not located him in the Blue Book or in the Directory of Directors, so they confined themselves to chatter about the girl.

He had warned Dorothy in the cab that they were capable of coupling their names, and she had laughed it off and acted as if she would not object. Did she wish to be engaged to him? Was it possible that such a girl would marry a man in his position?

He had judged her character pretty shrewdly, so he had supposed. He knew she hoped to marry money, that she was sophisticated and worldly wise. Was it credible that she had lost her head over him to the extent of being willing to marry a

man she knew could not support her? He would find out. He would go to her, propose, and give her the chance to reject him. Although it was only nine o'clock, in view of the newspaper story, he ventured to disturb her. She answered her phone immediately.

"Hello, John, dear. Sweet of you to ring me up so bright and early. Have you seen the newspapers?"

"That's why I called you."

"Aren't they perfectly ravishing?"

"You mean to say you like that stuff?"

"Oh, I don't admire the literary style of some of the articles, but they are quite thrilling, don't you think?"

"But do you realize that they practically announce our engagement? It's atrocious!"

"If I don't mind, why should you?"

"For heaven's sake, Dorothy, do you mean to say you would be fool enough to marry me?"

"How sweetly you put it! Come right over here and ask me and see what I will say."

"I'll be right over."

Lady Dorothy hung up, threw back the sheets and thrust two white feet over the side of the bed, waved them around until her toes collided with a pair of silver mules, thrust her feet into them and slipped into her bathroom.

In ten minutes he was at her door, and she was nearly ready to receive him.

"My dear Dorothy," he said when he had greeted her, "I am at present practically penniless, but I have prospects that might justify me in asking you to marry me. Will you take me on these terms?"

"Consider yourself taken. Now, don't be sentimental, old boy, I hate it. Just sit down quietly until I go back and get my hair properly arranged."

He obeyed her, considerably set up by her acceptance and a bit surprised by her nonchalance. Considering that she was mad enough to engage herself to a nobody, she might at least have consented to an embrace. He didn't mind very much. He wasn't exactly an amorous boy himself. It would be a very good arrangement in the end, but only passion would excuse or ex-

plain her acceptance of him. And yet, she hated sentiment.

"I have had a great idea," said Dorothy, when she finally emerged perfectly groomed. "We are going to get a terrific amount of publicity over this. When the papers discover your lowly shop, they are going to burst with sentiment and mush. Your American people just adore that sort of thing, you know. So do mine, for that matter. Look how they exude about the royal family."

"Now, I'm going to be a sweet helpful *fiancée* and I am coming into your shop for several hours a day to sell things. I suspect the police will have to call out reserves to keep away the crowds, and you'll push that Pink Shop right off the map."

"Dorothy," said John, in surprise, "you would do this for me?"

"For us, my dear," she said. "I'm going to fix it so you can make a barrel of money right away. You better order large quantities of stock, because we're going to sell an awful lot. We'll receive the reporters this afternoon, and tell them our sweet little romance."

"If you are willing to do it, I don't see how I can fail to take advantage of your wonderful generosity. You are quite right about the publicity and the chance to buy something from Lady Dorothy will draw thousands."

"Boost your prices sky high. They won't haggle with me."

"You have caught on to American methods quicker than any Briton ever did before."

"You don't know the half of my scheming," she said, significantly. "You'll find out. Run along now. Yes, just one kiss."

So that ended a curious proposal and acceptance. John told himself that he was a happy man, and then he thought of getting Elsie on the phone and telling her the good news. Elsie, he was informed by a masculine voice, had gone home with a severe headache.

John went into his little office and astonished the wholesalers by ordering enormous quantities of stuff of all kinds. He placed ads for four additional employees, because

he foresaw an overwhelming rush when the new saleswoman came to work.

Persons not well acquainted with the race are oftentimes heard to say that the English are slow, despite the fact that they are the cleverest traders and best salesmen in the world, and beat Americans atrociously in the contest for the markets of the earth. It is true we invented modern advertising, but they have developed it in their own way and in some respects surpass us even in this modern method of disposing of goods.

Lady Dorothy Devon was quick to appreciate the gullibility of the American public and the craving of its newspapers for sensations. She realized how it would love this story of an earl's daughter falling in love with a little shopkeeper about to be crushed by unfair competition, and how it would revel in the idea of the dainty aristocrat going into the shop to sell goods to aid her lover.

When the reporters called on her for confirmation of her engagement that afternoon, she confirmed it and gave them the remainder of her story. The press agent of the vaudeville theater at which she was booked saw its news value also, and helped it along. It was evident that Lady Dorothy was in the way of being the most popular woman before the public.

She announced that she would be at the Yellow Shop from eleven to one, and from three thirty to five thirty every day. The newspapers devoted enough space to the yarn in the morning to jam a store ten times the size of the Yellow Shop, and business started with a rush as soon as the place opened.

Most of the female visitors were as anxious to see the masculine person who had won the love of the British noblewoman as they were to get a glimpse of her ladyship.

When Dorothy arrived about eleven o'clock, police had to force a path for her through the throbbing multitude and there wasn't room in the Yellow Shop to turn around.

John had brought in two policemen to force customers to depart after making a purchase. The clerks were hardly able to move, but they were taking in money with

both hands. The visitors did not care what they bought—anything to get in. Nearly everybody congratulated him, and when Dorothy finally arrived they pawed her over considerably.

The curious, rather malicious sense of humor which the English girl possessed was strangely satisfied by the situation; she had a sort of perverted delight in the simplicity of the American people. This carried her through what was a very trying state of affairs.

John Green was in a mood of dissatisfaction and disgust, despite the prosperity which the crowd meant to his business. He objected strongly to being an object of morbid and hysterical curiosity. He resented the lack of reserve which had caused Dorothy to broadcast the engagement between them, and made her take the public into her confidence regarding the unfortunate condition of his business.

He was horribly confused by the frank stares and the impudent witticisms of his customers, and when Dorothy came and held his hand publicly he felt like a freak at a circus.

"For God's sake, Dorothy, how can you go through such an experience?" he demanded. "I feel like the biggest ass that Barnum ever dreamed of; and he dreamed of some big ones."

"Carry on, old top," she laughed. "It will be the making of your business and will double my salary. Yes, *madame*, I love him very dearly. Don't you think he's handsome?"

The fury of John's expression when she blandly discussed him with a woman who was buying a bottle of perfume amused her intensely.

The crowd did not vanish when she went away at one o'clock. It swirled in and out of the shop, and business continued briskly. About one o'clock John heard the sound of martial music, and presently a squad of police forced back the crowd to permit the passage of a uniformed brass band playing "Red Hot Mamma."

Behind the band came a big automobile containing Lady Dorothy, accompanied by her press agent, and two mounted police brought up the rear. The parade feature

had been contributed by the publicity department of the theater.

Elsie had watched the hippodrome features of the Yellow Shop sale with mingled feelings. John had telephoned to her house the night before announcing his engagement, and she had managed to congratulate him sweetly, a great effort.

Realizing fully that the gigantic business at the Yellow Shop was putting money in her own pockets, she grew more and more furious as the day went on, indignant with John, utterly disgusted with Lady Dorothy for blazoning their love affair in the public prints and coining it into profits.

Finally she got a sheet of cardboard and lettered rapidly. When completed she stuck it conspicuously in her window. It read:

Yes, we have no Lady Dorothy, but we sell anything the Yellow Shop offers for twenty per cent less.

The sign had no effect whatever. Nobody was in the least interested in bargains that day; they preferred to pay twenty per cent more and peek at Lady Dorothy and John Green.

By six in the evening the Yellow Shop was completely denuded of stock. More than three thousand dollars' worth of goods had been carried away, and the prospects for to-morrow was even greater.

John, despite his dislike of the situation, was business man enough to order hugely, and already trucks were beginning to deliver. He had increased his orders several times during the day, and now expected to have five thousand dollars' worth of stock on hand for next day. He knew how the papers would go to the story of the day at the Yellow Shop, and realized that the second day would far exceed the first in total business, provided Dorothy did not get cold feet.

She phoned him not to come over that evening. She would go to bed immediately after the night performance at the theater. The audience had gone completely mad about her at the afternoon appearance. Such a scene of enthusiasm had never been witnessed in the theater. New York was demonstrating how it loved a lover.

"Can you imagine the indignation of the pater if this stuff gets cabled to him?" demanded Dorothy on the phone. "I'd give a week's salary to see his face when he reads it."

"I don't blame him," said John. "Let's call it off, Dorothy."

"Don't be an idiot!" she retorted. "In America, do as the Americans do."

He locked the front door, pulled down the curtains, and worked feverishly with the assistants to place the new stock which had been delivered during the late afternoon. About ten o'clock a persistent banging at the door induced him to open it, and he was confronted by the press agent and the booking manager of the vaudeville circuit.

"Mr. Green," said the booking manager, "I want to put you on for ten weeks with Lady Dorothy."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"I'll give you two thousand dollars a week to appear with her in vaudeville."

"I'll be damned if I do!" he reported. "I'm spectacle enough right here in this store."

"Twenty-five hundred. You are well worth it."

"No, sir!"

"I'm having a sketch written, ready by Monday, called King Cophetua Reversed," said the press agent. "It just fits your case."

"You go to hell!" said the indignant John Green. "Not for a million will I go into vaudeville in that or any other kind of an act."

"Then you are a fool," said the booking manager. "Here is a chance to pick up twenty thousand dollars in ten weeks. If you wait a few minutes you won't be worth a nickel. Just now the public wants to see what you look like."

"Have you put this up to Lady Dorothy?" asked John.

"Not yet. We only just thought of it."

"Well, even if she consented, I wouldn't, so that's that."

He was so final in his manner that they gave up the job and departed. By half past ten John was ready to call it a day, and rather sick at heart he locked up the shop.

He was just as proud as he had ever been as John Doran. He had been carried away by Dorothy's attractions to the extent of proposing to her; he supposed he was sincerely in love, and that she loved him. Whatever her good intentions, she had made them both utterly and completely ridiculous, and he resented it while he profited by it.

The Pink Shop was still open, doing a fair business with stragglers who had been drawn down the street to gape at the darkened Yellow Shop. He saw Elsie's card still in the window; recognized the printed script as her work.

He winced at the sarcasm on the card. How could Elsie do such a thing when she was a partner in the enterprise, being made prosperous by Dorothy's advertising strategy and hard work? He must talk with Elsie and explain things; he would like to have her understand that he had not approved of Dorothy's deft use of their engagement for publicity purposes.

This was no time, however, as he would injure her standing with her new employer by entering the Pink Shop to converse with her, and besides, he was a bit ashamed to discuss the whole affair. He knew Elsie would feel that it was degrading a beautiful thing to drag it through the columns of the newspapers.

For several days the rush continued, but Lady Dorothy was wearing out so far as selling was concerned. Her time at the store grew more and more short. On the fifth day, she telephoned that she had such a headache that she could not stand the bad air and the crowds.

The newspapers, too, were getting tired of this particular romance. They had dug up a few others which were making the front pages.

Business continued excellent, but the crowds in the street slowly melted. At the end of the week, John had disposed of eleven thousand dollars' worth of goods with a profit of more than three thousand, but he knew that the boom was over. He had seen Dorothy at her hotel nearly every night for at least an hour or so, and when he was with her, his resentment of her advertising methods seemed most unfair.

They had been used for his benefit, the girl was obviously devoted to him, and certainly, one as delicately nurtured and high bred as she, could not be blamed for growing weary of acting as a shop girl.

He agreed with her cheerfully when she said she could not come in any more, and was pleased to have her approve his refusal to go into vaudeville, though, of course, he did not understand her real reason.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ELSIE'S FLIGHT.

A LETTER in a feminine hand which he recognized as Elsie's was delivered to John Green at the shop in the first mail Monday morning. He tore it open casually, and to his surprise, a pink check dropped out. He picked it up, glanced at it, and was thunderstruck to see that it was for the amount of eight thousand dollars, made payable to him, and signed by Elsie Evans. He pulled her letter out of the envelope, and this is what he read:

DEAR MR. GREEN:

I do not think I wish to be connected with the Yellow Shop any longer, especially since you have taken a business as well as a life partner. I do not wish any share of your recent profits and I feel that I was never entitled to a share in the money made on your real estate deal. I am keeping two thousand dollars, which seems to me to be a fair amount in view of what I put into the firm and what we earned up to the time I left the store.

As I do not wish to discuss the matter, I have left the Pink Shop, and am taking Alicia away from New York with me. I have succeeded in renting my apartment and am going to begin somewhere else, alone. I wish you a long life and happiness and I am hopeful that your *fiancée* will prove all that you believe her. Be assured of my deep gratitude for your kindness and generosity to me during the time we were associated together.

Yours most sincerely,

ELSIE EVANS.

With growing distress, he read this note. He smiled at the first few lines; how quickly he would persuade her to change her mind and how absurd it was to try to give back her profits. But when he found she had burned her bridges by leaving the Pink Shop and taking herself out of New York,

he was deeply disturbed. What was to be done?

Why had she done such a foolish, such a stupid thing? How the deuce was he to find her if she had left New York? Poor, silly little kid, she had never liked Dorothy because she had never understood her. And little Alicia, wasn't he to see her again? The youngster had twined herself around his heart. She must come back, he would make her come back. Why, the Yellow Shop was impossible with Elsie Evans never to work with him again. He would ask Dorothy's advice. She was shrewd, and knew women.

Dorothy was cross because he roused her out of a sound slumber to read the letter over the phone, but she was laughing when he finished.

"Why do you read that letter to me?" she asked. "Don't you know why she wrote it?"

"I can't understand it at all. I always depended upon her so completely."

"The girl is head over heels in love with you and she is mad with jealousy. She knows she has lost you, and can't stand it to be around any longer. Let her go. You are lucky she leaves town instead of getting you for breach of promise."

"Confound it, Dorothy, you are heartless and cruel."

"Well, you had no business to wake me up with such nonsense. I knew the girl was in love with you the first time I saw her. Call me up later in the day. I'm going back to bed."

She hung up on him, and he stood looking stupidly at the letter. It had never occurred to him that Elsie was in love with him, and he didn't believe it now. Why, the girl had always kept him at arm's length; she had always been strictly businesslike. Breach of promise indeed! How could Dorothy suggest such an outrageous thing about a girl like Elsie?

One thing was certain, she must not be allowed to get away like this; something would have to be done about it. While he was trying to fathom what that something might be, he got the second surprise of the morning.

Through the front door came a familiar

red face and rotund figure which belonged to only one person in the world, Standish Jones of Chicago. He rushed forward to greet him and dragged him into the office, for the morning business had begun briskly.

"What in the name of heaven brings you here?"

"A night train from Chicago. I have just had my breakfast and came right up here to see if they had backed up the wagon and carted you off to the asylum."

"There's nothing the matter with me," said John, testily.

"My dear boy, there are telegraph wires between New York and Chicago, and Lady Dorothy is very well known out there. All these mad antics of hers and yours have been reported in full."

John grinned at him. "Mad, maybe, but do you know we made three thousand dollars last week, net profit?"

Jones grinned back. "No fair, my boy. You promised not to make use of the credit of John Doran in any way."

"Well, I didn't. On the contrary this opposition store across the way is financed by the Doran Corporation and I haven't lifted a finger to close it up."

"You mean Terhune opened that shop to interfere with your trade?"

"Certainly. That's why I wired you to find out if he knew my identity."

Jones whistled softly. "Well, I guess that offsets Lady Dorothy's assistance."

"Why do you drag her into this? What has she got to do with the thing at all?"

"If the newspaper reports are correct, as occasionally happens, she got engaged to you, and came into the shop to give you the help of her celebrated personality. Without her would you have made three thousand profit last week?"

"No. On the contrary, I probably would have had a deficit."

"There you are. Using the credit of John Doran."

"I don't get you."

"You don't suppose Lady Dorothy would go huckstering for John Green, the shopkeeper, do you?"

"I do. That's just exactly what she did."

Jones laughed out loud. "You conceited

ass! You must think you are a combination of Valentino and Don Juan. She knows you are John Doran."

"She does not."

"She certainly does. I told her myself in Chicago."

John deflated like a punctured tire. Incredulity gave place to belief, chagrin and disgust.

"You confounded old grampus! What did you tell her for?"

"She knew it when she came to Chicago. I just confirmed it when she taxed me with it. She's got a picture of you that you gave some woman in London. Kept it on her bureau in her boudoir at the hotel. I happened to see it there one day when I called at her suite."

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"If you had any common sense, you would know that a girl of her class doesn't stoop to peddlers. You've won a fine woman and a good sport. She's caught a millionaire husband. It's perfectly all right. I congratulate you."

"My God!" John groaned. "I thought she was in love with me. I was proud because I won her when I was apparently struggling and penniless."

"You are a jackass. Women may lose their heads over young men, but not when a man is on the shady side of forty. We old fellows have got to wave a bag of money at them."

"You win your bet," said John, dispiritedly. At that moment, his face betrayed his real age. "I've had enough of this, made a blamed fool of myself from the beginning."

"No," said Jones. "I don't win. I was idiot enough to tell Terhune where you were and that permitted him to use your own money to put you out of business. I disqualified myself by that. You were doing nicely before he opened up across the street, weren't you?"

"I figured I'd have fifty thousand a year in a couple of years, but I might have come a cropper, of course."

"I call the bet off if you are willing, but I'll pay the hundred thousand if you say so. The credit of John Doran was used on my side instead of yours and that vio-

lated the agreement. I'll be glad to call it off because I think you could do just what you started out to do."

"It can't be done," said John forlornly. "I wasn't a success either in Chicago or here. Even changing my name and pretending to be poor couldn't keep a designing woman from laying a trap for me into which I walked with my eyes open. I'm a sap."

"Is the bet off?"

"If you like."

"Well, buck up and marry Lady Dorothy. She'll make you a fine wife. You can't blame the girl for having her eye on the main chance."

"If you had seen her walk in here and pretend to be assisting me put my little business over, if you had heard her talk about being a poor man's wife, and offer to help me with her salary! All the time she was laughing in her sleeve, pulling the wool over my eyes. Elsie sized her up right at the very beginning, but I was such a fool I didn't believe her."

"Who's Elsie?"

"Elsie!" said John, "Elsie is the real thing, a true-blue honest square, decent, little woman, and the prettiest thing you ever set eyes on."

"Then why don't you marry her?"

"I wish I could, but she's gone."

"And Lady Dorothy has you hard and fast."

"Is that so?" demanded John. "Well, I'm hanged if I'm going to marry her. She wants my money and she can have it, but she won't get me with it. I could never look at her treacherous face without thinking of how she bamboozled me."

"Bosh! Women always bamboozle men. That's how they get them. How old is this Elsie? What do you know about her?"

"She's about twenty-five, a young widow."

"A widow!" exclaimed Jones. "A widow. So you got mixed up with a widow."

"I didn't get mixed up with her at all. She simply won't have anything to do with me."

"Then she probably doesn't know you are John Doran. What are you going to do now?"

"I'm going to close this foolish store. Then I'm going to find Elsie, tell her who I am and ask her to marry me. If she loves me she will, and if she doesn't she won't. My money makes no difference to her. Then I'm going back to Chicago and make this crook Terhune wish his great-grandfather had never had any children."

"And how about your *fiancée*? You can't walk off and leave her like this, without a word of some kind."

"You see her, Jones. Tell her what you like. Let her to do what she likes."

"I'll see her," said Jones. "If it's money she wants and doesn't care what goes with it, I might make her an offer myself. I'd marry that girl in a minute. But you don't want to close this store; it's good business. Shut up the Pink Shop and sell this, that's the thing to do."

"No, I'll present it to Elsie if she won't have me, and if she'll take it."

John had seized his hat and coat, and was offering his hand to Jones.

"Where are you going?"

"After Elsie."

"Now, look here, my boy, don't rebound from one woman to another. You don't love this widow. It's just indignation because I was chump enough to tip you off about Dorothy. You can be sure the widow is worse."

"I know what I'm doing for the first time in months. Read this letter."

He thrust Elsie's letter into Jones's hands, and the banker considered it gravely.

"Well," he admitted, "it sounds all right, but it may be just a widow's trick. One nearly got me once."

"You're an old fool," said John, impolitely. He left him without another word, spoke to his clerk and slammed out of the store.

"So it's you," she said, coldly. "The lodger. What for did you ring my bell?"

"Do you know where Mrs. Evans went?"

"I do not. She said she never wanted to lay eyes on you again."

"You were her best friend," wheedled John. "Surely, you know her address. She must have told you."

"What do you want to see her for?"

"I want to make her take some money that belongs to her."

"You can leave it with me. I'll see that she gets it."

"Then you do know where she has gone. I have got to see her personally."

"What for?"

"Well," he said, in exasperation, "if you must know our private affairs, I want to ask her to marry me."

"I read the papers," she retorted. "You're going to marry this English lordess."

"No, I'm not. It was a mistake. Really, Mrs. Cohen, please tell me where to find Elsie."

"Come in," she said, a little more cordially. "I think you are a little old for her, but maybe she will overlook that. Where did I put that paper? Here it is. She's gone to a place called Ruthven, New York, where she used to live. It's 21 Spruce Street, care of Mrs. Spivvens."

"I certainly appreciate this," he said, earnestly.

"Well," said Mrs. Cohen, regarding him appraisingly, "I kind of hope you get her because the poor young thing ought not to be alone with her baby. You was always a gentleman when you lived in her flat, and she ought to know you pretty well by this time."

"Did she ever indicate to you that she liked me?" he demanded, eagerly.

"You talk to her. I got all my work to do."

Smiling broadly at him, she showed him the door, and he was not loathe to go since he had the information he had come here to get.

He had never heard of Ruthven, and found, on inquiry, that it was a village about forty miles out with infrequent trains. As there didn't happen to be one for three

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRAILING THE ONE WOMAN.

MRS. COHEN opened the door of her apartment a crack, and looked over the person who had rung her bell. When she recognized him she opened it a little wider.

hours, he hired a closed automobile and was speeding on his way in half an hour.

During the ride, he had time to consider as Jones had suggested, but consideration only convinced him that he was in great need of Elsie. He realized that he had always depended upon her. Even when dazzled by Lady Dorothy, he had felt comfortable and completely at home in Elsie's presence.

He had loved the little room in the apartment, regretted it ever since he had left it. He had missed Elsie tremendously since he had sent her to the Pink Shop and had thought about her continuously even during the past week.

Where Dorothy was hard, she was soft, where the English girl was bitter and sophisticated, she was sweet and innocent, her willingness her demureness, her daintiness, her loveliness were enchanting as he visualized her, sitting in the car which was whirling him toward her.

He was by no means confident about his reception. Lady Dorothy's mercenary motives had taken away his assurance in his own attractiveness. And he must have hurt Elsie to have her send him back her own earnings from the shop and write him that letter. Perhaps she did not love him. Supposing she had departed so suddenly because she had heard from some one she really cared for in Ruthven. He thought of more reasons why she should not marry him than why she should, such was his present humility.

There would be no more false pretenses; he would tell her frankly who he was, and offer her his heart and hand, as they say in romances. Such was his mood that he hoped the knowledge of his real affluence might influence her decision. The very thing that made him hate Dorothy he would welcome in Elsie.

Eventually he arrived before a small white house with a white picket fence in front of it and a gravel path leading to the front door. Playing on the path was Alicia. He knocked on the pane of glass between himself and the driver, and was out of the car almost before it stopped. Alicia saw him, uttered a whoop of joy, and ran toward him. He picked her up, kissed her,

and, carrying her on his arm, rang the bell. The door was opened by Elsie, who started, turned white, but said coldly:

"Mr. Doran, I believe."

Poor John recoiled as though he had been struck in the face.

"You—you know who I am?" he mumbled.

"Yes. May I ask how you secured my address?"

"From Mrs. Cohen. May I come in?"

Elsie led the way into a parlor which opened off a narrow hall. It was a small, old-fashioned room with horsehair chairs and sofa and an ancient square piano. John took a seat, and Elsie sat down and waited expectantly. It was hard to begin. Alicia climbed down from his arms, went to her mother, turned and regarded him with wide blue eyes.

"Why did you run away?" he finally succeeded in asking.

"I was no longer needed, and I was hurt," she said quietly. "When I thought of the way I struggled to help you make both ends meet, of the nights when I didn't sleep, worrying about the future of the shop—and all the time it was just a game for you. You who were fabulously rich—you were playing, and I was working."

"I'm sorry," he said meekly. "When did you find out about me?"

"Recently. From a clerk in my store who used to work for you in Chicago."

"But that was no reason why you should return money that belonged to you, your honest profits—and do you know that last week we made over three thousand dollars net?"

"I am not interested in any profits made with the aid of your *fiancée*. The thing which really made me go was your willingness to exploit your engagement, something that ought to be most sacred to you, and turn it into money. Money must be your god."

"I am sorry you feel this way about me, because it makes what I came to ask you hopeless."

"If there is anything I can do for you, of course I shall try to do it."

"I want to ask you to marry me," he said simply.

She flushed, and her eyes snapped. "How can you say such things, when the whole world knows you are going to marry Lady Dorothy Devon."

"The whole world knows more than I do. I wouldn't marry her if she were the last woman in the world."

"Oh!" said Elsie, leaning forward. "What has happened?"

"Elsie, that girl knew all along who I was, pretended to love me for myself, and all the time she wanted my fortune. I never really loved her, or I couldn't have permitted the circus stuff last week. It sickened me a little as it was, but if I had been in love with her I wouldn't have tolerated it for a second."

"And when did you first find out about her?"

"This morning."

"You must be in a hurry to marry some one. Since I know about your money, I should be as bad as she is if I accepted you. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. John Green Doran, but I don't need your money, and I won't marry you."

John sighed, and rose from his chair. "I didn't suppose you would," he said humbly. "After all, I am forty-three years old, and I can't expect to inspire real love in any woman."

"I'm going back to Chicago, Elsie. You probably want to know what the whole thing was about. I was very rich and terribly conceited. I boasted that I could start at the bottom and rise to the top all over again."

"I bet a man that I could have a business worth fifty thousand a year within five years. So I came East and started the little shop, and then I met you."

"If it hadn't been for you, I suppose I would have got tired and quit long ago, but you were a wonderful companion and really an inspiration. Probably I have been in love with you for months without knowing it, but I was still swell-headed enough to fall for the ingenious flattery of Lady Dorothy."

"You are right not to marry me. I'm planning to turn the store over to you. The big joke is that the Pink Shop was founded

with my own money by a dishonest associate, to keep me from winning in New York long enough for him to loot my property in Chicago. It will be closed immediately, and you'll have a nice little business of your own."

"I won't accept," murmured Elsie. "I can't accept. I don't want the shop without you."

He looked at her searchingly, but said nothing.

"I didn't think you loved me," she continued in a low tone, "and I was afraid you thought I might take you for your horrid money."

"Do you love me, Elsie?"

She smiled at him. "From the moment I entered the shop and asked for a job, and you said: 'Take off your hat, you are hired.'"

"Oo!" chortled Alicia, a moment later. "Mr. Green is kissing mother."

Lady Dorothy was very angry when she found that John Green had jilted her after all she had done for him, but there didn't seem anything else she could do about it. To sue him would make her ridiculous after her hippodrome love affair, and besides her British inhibitions forbade such a thing. She did not actually love him, and Standish Jones began to offer his fortune as a substitute for that of Doran. Though not so large, it would be satisfactory, and he was presentable if a trifle old.

The Yellow Shop was sold on easy terms to Spencer Fleetwood, who had his ill-gotten capital with which to set himself up in business.

Doran pounced upon Terhune before that would-be rascal had time to accomplish much of anything. He found no evidence of illegal proceedings, but every indication that the man had planned to play traitor. He forced him to sell back his stock at a figure which gave him a profit over his original investment, and put him out of office. Neither Terhune nor Fleetwood were in the least likely ever to divulge the murder plot.

Mr. and Mrs. Doran and their daughter Alicia are very happy in their Chicago home.



Franklin's Vacation

By GORDON STILES

IF it had been suggested to Gilbert Franklin that he led a sheltered life, he doubtless would have considered it a tremendous joke. How could it be possible, he would have argued, for a man who had started from small beginnings—almost nothing—and become one of the world's greatest financial powers, to be classed with sheltered individuals? Nevertheless, no girl, convent-bred, ultra-chaperoned, could have been more effectively shielded from contact with the preponderant elements of humanity than Gilbert Franklin.

The barriers that had separated him from life had been of gradual growth, to be sure; perhaps it was for that very reason that they were the more impenetrable.

His whole existence was ordered; everything arranged; everything mapped out. In the morning his valet aroused him at ten minutes after seven. He arose to find his bath drawn, his clothing for the day laid out.

He breakfasted at precisely eight o'clock, and when he reached his office in Wall Street—via limousine—he found the day's

work spread out before him. Appointments, a few letters which he personally must scan, matters up for decisions. No triumph of mechanical genius ever ran more smoothly than the money producing machine which Mr. Franklin controlled.

If the system had begun and ended with his business, things might have been different. But its insidious ramifications extended into the so-styled "vacations" which Mr. Franklin permitted himself annually.

He never traveled without a secretary, who looked after the irksome details of securing reservations on ships and trains, served as buffer between his chief and visitors, settled bills, attended to correspondence—in short, who guarded Gilbert Franklin as an ardent horticulturist would guard a delicate and unique plant.

His domestic affairs were not complicated. His wife had been dead for twenty years; his only child a daughter, Janet. And the relations between him and the girl, now twenty-three, were very similar to those which obtained between him and his busi-

ness associate. What sentiment there may have been in the make-up of Gilbert Franklin had evaporated in the course of his upward climb.

He loved Janet, in his own way. But the route of her inclinations diverged sharply from that of his own, so that each year saw them a little farther apart.

He cared nothing for society; it figured largely in the life of his daughter. When Janet was in town they met at dinner—seldom otherwise. Then she would chat of matters which she thought might possibly interest him, and he would talk generalities.

When Janet came to him with a request he would listen and reply on the instant. It was yes or no. And the girl had inherited enough of her father's nature to understand that he meant exactly what he said; that any effort to swerve him would be futile.

On these occasions Gilbert Franklin instinctively thought in terms of business expediency. If Janet was planning an elaborate party her father would listen to her outline of the affair, consider whether or not it would serve the purpose for which it was intended, calculate rapidly whether the expense involved would be justified, and answer. The purchase of a new car, a trip abroad, a charitable donation—each became, *per se*, a business problem, and as such was solved by Gilbert Franklin.

Thus, what happened to Guy Fenderson when he waited upon Mr. Franklin to ask for the hand of Janet, would not have surprised one familiar with the conditions described above. By the same token, inasmuch as he was meeting his potential father-in-law for the first time, and considering that he himself was the most reasonable of beings, Mr. Fenderson was utterly non-plused despite the partial preparation for the interview which Janet had supplied.

She had said, "Dad is a very peculiar man, Guy. He thinks like lightning, and makes up his mind about a thing at once. Sometimes he provokes me frightfully, but I know he always tries to do what he believes to be best. -I'm sure you'll get on all right with him, dear. You are so straightforward, and—and—oh, Guy! I *know* it will be all right."

Perhaps Janet was not quite so certain as she pretended to be; perhaps the wish was father to the thought. Anyhow, Gilbert Franklin listened quietly and attentively to Guy as the latter explained, "Of course, Mr. Franklin, I'm not a wealthy man, by any standard. But for two years my law practice has netted me more than fifteen thousand a year, and I ought to make twenty-five or thirty thousand next year, the way things look now. I can give Janet a decent home and support her comfortably while my practice grows."

At the end Gilbert Franklin had looked steadily at the young man, said slowly and clearly, "I'm sorry, Mr. Fenderson, but I do not wish you and Janet to marry."

"But, Mr. Franklin, what particular objection have you to me?"

"If I had cared to specify, I would have done so. I simply stated that I did not care to have you and my daughter marry. I hope you will excuse me; I have an appointment directly. Good morning, Mr. Fenderson."

Angry and bewildered, Guy went off to break the news to Janet.

II.

JANET'S eyes grew troubled as she listened to Guy's account of the interview. She had felt—at least hoped—that the nature of the occasion would cause her father to view the matter as something different—as something to be considered not alone from the point of expediency—that the human element which she felt must be dormant within him would come to the surface at so important and delicate a moment. And never had she experienced such a sense of utter hopelessness as when Guy made his report.

"I was astounded," he told her. "He wouldn't even discuss it. And he had listened to what I had to say quite earnestly, only to dismiss the whole matter with a word. I felt like a schoolboy who had been unjustly rebuked, but who has no recourse."

"Guy, dear, you musn't be too hard on dad. I used to think he was unfathomable. Later I have come to understand him to a

certain degree. I don't want to marry you against his wishes, although I would, if it became necessary. There must be some way to manage it so that dad will come around. Give me a few days to think it out. And you can't worry, because I'll marry you anyhow, some time or other."

Guy grumbled a little, as was to be expected. Janet set herself to the solution of her problem.

To that end she carried her troubles to Maria Bassett, a sprightly widow of sixty, who served as mother confessor to most of the girls in Janet's set, and who was happily able to understand the hearts of those a half or a third of her own age. Sympathy and sound counsel were always to be had from Maria Bassett.

She listened gravely to Janet's doleful tale; pondered the question for a space. Finally she said: "Do you know, Janet, if I were you, I think I'd talk to De Franier."

"De Franier!" echoed Janet in surprise. "What on earth could De Franier do for me? Why, I've heard people say that De Franier was a fakir and a humbug."

"De Franier, my dear, is a remarkable man. Fakir and humbug he may be for all I know. But his is an interesting philosophy, and his understanding of the human mind is—well, it's uncanny. I had De Franier here to see me a few days ago, and we talked a long time. I was greatly impressed, I don't mind admitting.

"He comes of a queer strain. His father was half French and half Spanish. His mother was a mixture of Italian, Roumanian, and Russian. He himself is the most profound student I have ever met. He flits from subject to subject, mastering each in turn, but never uses text books in his researches. If he wants to know something about chemistry, he procures the chemicals and sets to work; likewise, medicine. His knowledge of psychology is derived from the study of human beings, not from theories set down by others. You yourself know how uncanny he is as a mind reader, and how observations he has made concerning the stars have utterly disagreed with accepted beliefs, yet are more startling and reasonable.

"The man is not a doctor. Yet he can go before a gathering of medical men and hold them spellbound for hours. He is not a chemist, but the chemical fraternity pay attention when he speaks. He is ruthless in dissecting a person, but when he is through that person will admit the truth of what has been told him. So—just you go to De Franier and ask his advice as to how best to overcome your father's stand in this affair."

"But how am I to get to see De Franier? They tell me that he is the most difficult man in New York to pin down to an appointment; that even when he makes an engagement it's an even chance that he will not appear."

"That's true. You will have to trust to luck. Best go to see the man; he has a combination office, studio and laboratory in the Blythestone Building."

After a little more discussion, Janet agreed to Mrs. Bassett's plan. She promised to seek out De Franier without delay.

III.

MR. DE FRANIER was busy, Janet was told by a young man—half secretary, half office attendant—but if Miss Franklin would wait a few moments Mr. De Franier would be glad to see her. And for fifteen minutes the girl fumed impatiently, valiantly stifling her inclination to flee. She was not in the habit of awaiting the convenience of any one.

At last the young man disappeared again, reappeared and said: "Will you kindly step inside, Miss Franklin?"

Janet entered a high-ceiled apartment that savored of a successful dentist's waiting room—quiet and gloomy and furnished with stuffed leather chairs and couches. De Franier stood with his back to one of the tall, narrow windows.

He wore a sort of smock and was smoking a monster cigarette which protruded from the end of a slender amber holder, thus placing a distance of some ten inches between his lips and the fire end of the cigarette.

He bowed low. "I am charmed," he said, "to be thus honored, Miss Franklin. You will forgive me for keeping you wait-

ing—please. I was extremely occupied when you came, just completing a little experiment. You see, I have been drinking poison.”

“Drinking poison!” repeated Janet in horror.

“Ah, yes. But you must not look so frightened. I had the antidotes quite handy; I was merely trying to ascertain how much the system could absorb without ill effects. That is finished, however. Now I know, and the subject ceases to interest me. I am more concerned about you. About the predicament in which you find yourself.”

“Why!” exclaimed Janet, startled. “How did you know—what makes you think—”

“My dear Miss Franklin. How can I tell? All I am sure of is that you are greatly upset over something.” He paused, resumed: “Something which concerns one or more people who are very close to you—very close and very dear. But it will be better that you shall tell me. I am only guessing, after all.”

Impressed beyond words, Janet plunged into her story. She had not gone far when De Franier, nodding slowly, said; “I quite understand, Miss Franklin. What you desire from me, then, is advice or assistance to the end of altering your father’s decision in the matter of your marriage.”

“I hoped you might help me, somehow,” Janet said.

“Perhaps I can, perhaps not. Certainly, advice will be of no avail. I have not met Mr. Franklin, but I have heard enough of him to know that an ordinary campaign of persuasion would prove futile. There is, I believe, one chance. Tell me, do you know of any social or semi-social function at which your father is likely to be present?”

Janet thought a moment. “Yes,” she replied, “he always attends the annual dinner of the Hospital Aid Association of which he is honorary president. That comes on Wednesday week, at the Biltmore.”

“Good! I will try to work out a plan. But you must not be discouraged if you hear nothing from me for some weeks. I will let you know directly any definite results are obtained—good or evil.”

Janet rose. “I can’t imagine what you have in mind. But I thank you for your interest, Mr. De Franier.”

“It is nothing,” he said, as he bowed her to the door. “It is a pleasure. Good-by, Miss Franklin.”

Janet made her way to the street, wondering.

IV.

ARRANGING to have himself included among the guests at the Hospital Aid dinner was a simple matter for Jacques De Franier and the fact that he found himself seated next to Gilbert Franklin who, as usual, had declined to preside, may or may not have been a coincidence. De Franier laid his place card aside, fingered his napkin, waited for his immaculate neighbor to open the conversation.

Presently, Franklin said, after a somewhat interested sidelong appraisal of De Franier: “To-night’s gathering is unusually large, it seems to me.”

De Franier’s eyes swept the long table. “So I fancy. I have not been present at any of the former dinners. If the gathering is unusually large, it also is unusually troubled.”

Franklin glanced quickly at the other’s face, then to the place card. “I have heard of you, Mr. De Franier,” he said and stopped. He could not have told in what connection.

“I dare say, Mr. Franklin. And I of you.”

“I’m curious to know what you mean by ‘unusually troubled,’” pursued the banker. “I didn’t quite understand the allusion.”

“Only that something is gnawing at most of these people. In some cases, it is trifling; in others, serious.”

“For instance.”

De Franier studied the line of faces opposite for a moment. “For instance,” he repeated, “the lady two seats away from the man opposite me is considering a divorce. She should go on; she will be happier after she has it.”

Franklin started, stared at his companion. “That lady,” he observed, “is my sister!”

"I didn't know," said De Franier, simply. Franklin leaned closer, went on in a low tone: "Why do you say that about a divorce? Really, I'm curious to know. Have you heard—no, you couldn't."

"I have heard nothing," De Franier cut in. "I had no idea of her identity."

"I'll tell you," said Franklin, "Mrs. Marlowe, the lady in question, is considering a divorce. I, myself, have known it only two days and no other member of the family—to say nothing of others—is aware of it, to the best of my knowledge. Tell me. How did you know?"

"I have studied a little the effects of thought on the human countenance. It is an interesting subject."

"Then you're a mind reader!"

"I suppose I would be called that. I do not care for the term. I make no claims or pretensions. It is only for my own amusement that I employ the gift or talent or curse—what you will."

"It's remarkable," said Franklin.

"Oh! Not very. No more than that I should tell you that you are in desperate need of a holiday."

Franklin laughed. "Got you there! I've just returned from a six-weeks' vacation."

"Which means nothing," De Franier returned quickly. "You, Mr. Franklin, have not had a holiday in fifteen years!"

"I've been abroad at least once a year in that time. And I've kept my hands entirely off business for the most part."

"I repeat, nevertheless, that you have not had a holiday. A real holiday means a change. You have had no change. Let me make myself clear. Your so-called vacations have been arranged for you, your itinerary laid out, tickets bought, passports seen to, luggage packed—all these things have been done by somebody else.

"Your secretary and valet have accompanied you on each trip. The first has stood between you and newspaper men, charity seekers and cranks. You have not been annoyed. Your valet has carried on as usual. Hotel accommodations and transportation always have been arranged for you. Nothing has been allowed to mar your complete rest and comfort. Barring business, which has been left in competent hands,

there has been no change—only a little less of the same. That is all. So, I repeat, you are in the greatest possible need of a holiday."

"But my health is good. I feel perfectly well."

"You are an ill man, Mr. Franklin!"

"In what way am I ill?" challenged the banker. "Suppose you specify."

"That I would not care to do. I am no doctor. Yet, were you to take a real holiday, I am sure that you would admit afterward, that I am right in saying that you are an ill man now."

For some moments Franklin said nothing, busied himself with his food. He was thoughtful, however. De Franier's references to Mrs. Marlowe were not to be ignored.

At last he turned to the other. "Could you map out such a holiday for me?" he inquired.

"Easily," returned De Franier. "But you would have to put yourself absolutely in my hands—follow implicitly the formula I shall lay down."

"H'm! Suppose I didn't like it."

"Then you would break faith—and derive no good from the experiment."

After a long pause, Franklin said: "How long would you want to govern my life?"

"One month, I should say."

"Then, by George, I'm going to take you up! I'm interested to see how your theories work out. When do I report?"

"At my office, to-morrow morning. Here is my card. I shall be ready with details then."

"Very well," said Franklin, "I'll be there."

V.

THREE days from that time, a somewhat dilapidated sedan, driven by De Franier and shared by Gilbert Franklin, rolled off the ferry in Jersey City and sped away to the south. De Franier, whose attention had been largely occupied in handling the car in the traffic of Manhattan and on the ferry, now looked with approval upon the khaki trousers and the far from new coat worn by his companion.

"Those will do nicely," he said. "And

"I suppose you have no more than one hundred dollars with you."

"Not quite that much," returned Franklin. "And I have pyjamas and one change of underwear in my bag, a safety razor, comb, brush and toothbrush. That's the lot—just as you ordered. I hope you're satisfied and I don't see why I shouldn't be let in on the rest of the game as long as we are actually on our way."

"All is arranged. You shall see for yourself."

"No harm should come of telling me where we are bound."

"You shall see," was all De Franier would say.

They traversed roads unfamiliar to Franklin and he occupied himself trying to guess their destination. He believed, after a couple of hours had passed, that they were bound in the general direction of Cape May and, as a matter of fact, this surmise was not far wrong.

He was beginning to question his wisdom in submitting himself so unreservedly to the supervision of De Franier; yet, on the whole, he was deriving a strange kick from the proceedings.

It was along about four o'clock in the afternoon when they turned into a sandy and ill-conditioned road which led through a dreary waste of hummocky land. The smell of salt marshes assailed them. In reply to Franklin's inquiring look, De Franier observed: "We are almost there."

"There ' looks like a wilderness to me, then."

"Oh, no, not at all, as you shall see."

Rounding a turn where the road was flanked by scrub growth, they came upon a wide and reedy inlet, both banks of which were occupied by the strangest collection of habitations Mr. Franklin had ever seen. A sort of squatters' colony, no less.

Shacks on stilts, unpainted and out of repair. Farther back, in the lee of the dunes, an uninviting array of tents and canvas-roofed shanties. In and out and among it all, duck-board walks sprawled and rickety wooden docks supported by crazily tilted piles thrust themselves gauntly out into the silty water.

Could it be, Franklin thought, that De

Franier intended him to remain for any length of time in this spot? He asked no questions, however. Not even when his guide and temporary guardian drove up to a board shack bearing a crude sign: "H. Brody. Real Estate and Ins."

At the sound of De Franier's honking, a pudgy, collarless individual emerged from within. He was smoking a vile-smelling pipe and obviously chewing tobacco at the same time.

"I suppose," said De Franier, "that everything is in order for Mr. Rogers."

The man nodded. Franklin started a little. He had forgotten that, on the insistence of De Franier, he had left his identity behind him and that he was to be known for the coming four weeks as James Rogers.

The real estate man said: "Can't get out there with that bus, though. Too soft. I'll help you tote anything you got."

"No. We can manage it. A couple of bags; that's all. Just tell me where it is."

"See those big dunes just before you hit the marsh? Well, it's right this side of the old he one there. I got Mr. Rogers's name on a piece o' paper pinned on the tent flap."

"All right. Come on, Jim," called De Franier. "Bring the bags," he added as Franklin started to climb out empty handed.

The latter obeyed somewhat sheepishly. He could not remember having touched a hand bag for years.

VI.

MR. FRANKLIN—for the nonce, Mr. James Rogers—sat on a canvas camp stool in the entrance of his eight-foot tent and took a mental inventory of the situation.

An hour ago, he had ruefully watched De Franier depart and had successfully stifled a desire to leap upon and strangle this person who had begun to assume the rôle of tormentor. But his anger had been tempered by amusement at the thought that De Franier, with all his vaunted wisdom, could believe that throwing a man into a dump like this, on his own and with practically no money, would benefit that man in any way.

But he had held his peace grimly. Having agreed to go through with the thing, it never occurred to him that all he had to do was to step out of it. So he sat, now, gazing disgustedly about him, wondering what he should do next.

It seemed as if De Franier had selected the most terrible part of the tent city. Here the sand merged into the marsh and the shacks adjoining his tent site stood above an area of caked mud while the green slime on the poles which supported them extended far too high, Mr. Franklin thought.

There was a smell of rotting seaweed. On the duck-board ramps leading to some of the shanties, disheveled women with lank wisps of short hair loitered. A man was trying to patch a battered, unpainted skiff, surrounded by a small crowd of children some of whom were dressed in makeshift bathing suits—others in attire that seemed to have been picked at random from the family wardrobe.

A man came up the walk in front of Mr. Franklin's domicile, carrying a basket of flounders; set about cleaning them in front of a neighboring tent. He nodded to the newcomer and said: "Good evening."

Mr. Franklin managed to nod; sat absently watching the other as he worked, flipping fish trimmings over his shoulder to land where they would.

The man finished his task, called to somebody in the tent, and a hippy woman wearing a gray sweater appeared, took up the tin plate of fish and went inside. The man wiped his knife on his cotton duck trousers and lighted a pipe. Presently, the air was filled with the odor of frying fish.

It was not very appetizing, but it reminded Mr. Franklin that there was such a thing in the world as food. He wished that De Franier had not been so abrupt. Not a word had been said regarding commissary arrangements. Mr. Franklin explored the interior of his tent.

There was nothing there to eat. A flash light, a box of fishing tackle, some "canned heat," a hatchet; but no food, not even a biscuit. Mr. Franklin came outside again, depressed and helpless.

A sweet mess he had got himself into! Stuck away in this hole, pledged to remain

four weeks at least, surrounded by perfectly terrible beings who did not look to be more than half human! Hell!

But—fish was cooking and Mr. Franklin was hungry. He must see what could be done, where food could be obtained. His eye wandered over the colony, but nothing resembling a restaurant met his view.

He did not know in which direction the heart of the place lay. Probably somewhere near the "office" of H. Brody. But he could not remember just where that was. As he stood hesitating, the man next door spoke again.

"Get in 's afternoon?"

"Yes," returned Franklin, shortly.

He felt a resentment that this uncouth individual should address him with such familiarity. Damned impudence. Then he remembered that he was not Gilbert Franklin to the other—that he was a rough-clad, nameless person. Perhaps he could find out where to buy food.

"Where do you get supplies here! Groceries, I mean," inquired Mr. Franklin.

"They's a store—Katz Brothers—'bout half a mile back. D'ye know where Cary's boathouse is?"

"No. I've never been in this section before."

"Didn't ya bring nothin' in with ya?"

"Not a thing," replied Franklin, cursing De Franier under his breath.

The other man moved over to where Franklin stood. "Le's see if I c'n tell ya so's ya won't go wrong. This place is tricky till ya get t' know y'r way 'round." He stood, surveying the straggling camp. "Oh," he said, sticking out a dirty and hairy hand, "my name's Devitt."

"Mine's Rogers," returned Franklin, after a slight hesitation.

"Glad ta meetcha, Mr. Rogers. Well, ya follow this path, till ya come ta—hello there, Guido—come on here—meet Mr. Rogers—he's just come in 's afternoon."

The newcomer looked at Franklin and said: "How do, Meest' Rogers. I t'ink you lika dees place. I come here t'ree year now."

"Mr. Rogers wants to find Katz's store. Get some grub," offered Devitt. "I'm tryin' t' show him how t' go."

"Huh! You come 'longa me, Meest' Rogers. I show you."

"Much obliged," murmured Franklin and followed the Italian along the walk. Devitt called: "S'long. See ya later." Franklin said: "So long."

Traversing the gritty duck-boards beside Guido, Franklin felt like a man in a dream. What on earth was he, Gilbert Franklin, doing in this spot? Trailing off with a rough-neck Italian who was sure he would "lika dees place!" Foraging for something to eat!

At his side, Guido trudged along steadily and stolidly, the lines in his forehead giving him the appearance of one on whom the weight of the world rests. Presently, he turned to Franklin with: "You feesh?"

"A little," ventured Franklin. "Fishin' good here?"

"Ver, good! I taka da two mont' in da summer. I ketcha plenty da blackfeesh, da wikfeesh, da crab. I sella heem by Katz. Maka da forty, da feefty, da seexty dollar da wik. More dan I maka da mont' in da cit'."

They journeyed on silently until Guido said: "Here's da store."

It was a rough board structure about thirty by twelve, its shelves lined with tiers of canned goods while a miscellaneous collection of coarse garments hung from hooks in the ceiling. A glass case sheltered partly cut hams and hunks of bacon, cheese and pickles.

Franklin was entirely at a loss. What to ask for—what quantities? Guido stepped into the breach.

"Maybe you ain't used to da camping, Meest' Rogers. You ain't gotta nothing, hey?"

Franklin shook his head. "If you could give me a line on what to get here," he began.

"Sure! Sure!" Deftly, Guido ordered ham, bacon, eggs, salt, pepper, canned corn and peas, tomatoes, butter, bread—in quantities which would last about a week.

"You gotta da pot an' da pan?" he inquired. At the shake of Franklin's head, Guido selected a small skillet and a couple of saucepans, a couple of knives and forks, and some spoons. The purchases made a

huge bundle which the Italian shouldered without a word.

Of a sudden, Franklin realized that he was playing his part badly. Here he was accepting the services of this friendly chap as a matter of course. He was being Gilbert Franklin instead of Jim Rogers. He reached over and relieved Guido of the parcel.

"I'll carry that," he said. "I'm much obliged, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Pasquali—Guido Pasquali," supplied the other. "I can carry heem for you, Meest' Rogers. Eet ees nothing!"

But Franklin retained the bundle. Half-way back to the tent, Guido stopped.

"Deesa my place," he said, pointing to a shack, half canvas, half board, hard by a tiny dock to which a single cylinder kicker was moored.

"You wanta feesh, Meest' Rogers, I taka you. Hey? You wanta come for feesh in da morning?"

And Franklin found himself saying: "Yes. All right. What time? What do I bring?"

"Anyt'ing you got. I gotta da plenty line an' hook. I gotta da bait. We start, four o'clock—maybe ha'f pas'. I come peek you up in da boat."

"All right," said Mr. Franklin. "Good night."

"Gooda night, Meest' Rogers."

Devitt was smoking when Franklin returned to his tent.

"Did the wop fix you up?" he inquired, genially. "Can I help you any? It's hell gettin' things goin', ain't it? First two years I come down here, I was runnin' up t' that damn store every five minutes! Gotta system now."

"Oh, I'm all right, thank you," asserted Franklin with a lot more confidence than he felt, and disappeared within his tent.

Over the canned heat he fumed and swore. The cussed framework, as he termed it, was teetery and the frying pan tended to upset at the slightest touch. The bacon and eggs he eventually turned out were black and greasy.

He suddenly developed a profound respect for the more or less anonymous parties who prepared the golden offerings to which

he was accustomed each morning. Nevertheless, he ate what he had cooked—ate it, too, with a pride of accomplishment that was new to him. After which, he concocted some black and bitter coffee; drank the vile stuff with yet another feeling of victory.

Afterward, he went out into the gathering dusk. Devitt's pipe still glowed and its owner shouted: "Make out all right?"

Franklin, firing up himself, answered "Fine!"

Devitt invited: "If ya ain't got nothin' t' do, c'mon over an' meet th' missis."

But Franklin felt suddenly weary; too many strange things had come to pass that day. He was a bit confused. So he said: "Thanks. I'm pretty tired. Guess I'll turn in early."

"Oh, sure! Well. Some other time, then."

"Sure," said Mr. Franklin.

VII.

It would require a large, close-written book for the recording of the things Mr. Franklin learned during the weeks that followed.

He did meet Mr. Devitt's "missis." He met and mingled with the other wispy-haired women and the children in the atrocious garb. He fished with Guido Pasquali until he lost all squeamishness about cutting up crabs for bait, chumming with ground-up mossbunkers, removing from his hook weird and poisonous-looking creatures he had hauled from the deep.

All through it, he marveled. He sensed that these people with whom he talked and fished and prepared clambakes were human and wholesome and interesting. Also he sensed that they were of the swarming masses through which he had strode as a giant treading upon ants.

Each day, the hair of the women became less wispy, the unaffected friendliness of the men more acceptable, the children less dirty, less grotesquely clothed. A firm friendship sprang up between him and Guido.

He listened to the latter's day dreams—dreams of a detached house in Staten Island, with a bit of land for intensive vegetable gardening. And flowers for Rita

who now worked as janitress in a Second Avenue flat building. Oh, sure! It was coming! A couple more seasons and Guido would have enough.

And Franklin thought of his Westchester estate and the broad acres of rich land and the fact that he could always use a competent gardener and how a snug cottage could be brought into being by the stroke of a pen in the hand of Gilbert Franklin. And he made himself a promise as he listened to Guido.

Other thoughts crept in—of Janet, who did not know where he was. Of Guy Fenderson; he could see that young man's face more clearly than he had on that morning when he had dismissed him so crisply. He began to wonder if Janet—if what he had done had given her real pain. He'd like to see Janet—well—he would, in ten days.

Guido was going back to town. Franklin had still a week of servitude. He had not asked Guido about his work in the city; now he did. "Oh," said Guido. "Oh, I t'ink you know. I shina do shoe mosta da time."

"Like to see you some time, Guido. Write down your address for me, will you."

"Sure, Meest' Rogers." He scrawled it on a bit of paper which Franklin pocketed with a quiet satisfaction. Almost, he burst out with: "The devil with your shoe shining, Guido. You're coming out to live on my place—in a damned nice little house I'll build. And you'll have a good job and a piece of land for yourself. You and the missis."

But he held himself in check. And next day Guido departed.

VIII.

MR. FRANKLIN sniffed the morning air, stretched his arms into the sunlight. Lord! How good he felt. He had eaten a fine breakfast—a large slab of ham, three eggs, three cups of coffee, toast—and all good. Mr. Franklin had mastered the art of cooking over canned heat.

The air was keen and salty—not a bit like rotting seaweed, as it had been at first. Mr. Franklin felt totally unlike the man

whom De Franier had so heartlessly dumped among the sand dunes.

He was certain that he had not lost weight, but he felt pounds lighter, somehow. And these people—the kids romping in the sand, the women hanging worn garments to dry on precariously strung lines—they were a decent sort. He wished he could do something for them.

A restlessness gripped Mr. Franklin. A week to go! Too much! He had so many things he wanted to do in town—not at his office, particularly. He really must get back. But he had made a promise to De Franier.

Still—by George! Why not! To be sure, he had promised. But matters had not been the same. Now he could see what had been in De Franier's mind. And he realized that what the man had hoped for had been accomplished. Another week would not matter. He would go back to town at once!

"So," said De Franier, with a touch of reproach in his voice, "so you could not stick it out, as they say."

"I could," replied Gilbert Franklin, "but it wasn't necessary. Do you understand. I have a lot of things to do—things I should have done before. Do you see? I'll thank you later for what you have done—when I have more time."

"I quite understand, Mr. Franklin. Now,

you had better go and attend to your urgent affairs. I am very busy to-day."

"I am going at once," said Gilbert Franklin, "to see my daughter."

"Good!" said De Franier.

"Mr. Franklin," said the secretary, "the man you asked me to bring here, Pasquali, is outside. Shall I send him in?"

"Yes," said Franklin.

Guido came in, wonder in his dark eyes. Franklin began: "I'm obliged to tell you, Guido, that I had to fool you a little, down there at the shore. My name, as you know now, isn't Rogers at all."

"Course not, Meest' Franklin. I know—course—but I say to myself: 'Eef Meest' Franklin say he Meest' Rogers, he gotta gooda reason. It nonna my beez'ness.' I di'n' say nothing."

Franklin looked at the Italian, curiously—in surprise. "Do you mean to tell me that you knew all along? And kept mum about it? Man alive, how on earth did you know?"

Astonishment was written large on the Italian's face as he replied: "Why, Meest' Franklin! Why shou'n't I know? Ain't I shine your shoes, in deesa room, ev'ry day for da two year?"

"Holy Moses!" exclaimed Gilbert Franklin. Then he turned abruptly and stared in silence out of the window before he turned again to the waiting Guido.

THE END

U U U

THE WAFFLEUR SPEAKS

I'VE had my waffles, and the day is young.

The tang of coffee lingers on my tongue.

I could not feel downhearted if I would—

Joy reigns inside, and all the world is good.

Failures of other times are all forgot;

To-day shall bring what yesterday did not.

Show me the cause of previous defeat

And I shall flout it—ah, but life is sweet!

All apprehension to the breeze is flung:

I've had my waffles, and the day is young!

Strickland Gillilan.



Some Baby

By WILSON COLLISON

FROGGY MARTIN strolled into the Manhattan Restaurant one bright spring morning with a smile upon his battle-scarred face and a cigarette drooping between his lips.

Froggy was in high good humor, and all the world was aglow with and for him. Three days ago he had just knocked out the Two-round Kid in a hard fight; he had trimmed the Kid beautifully, and all the sporting writers were predicting great things for Froggy in the middle-weight class.

Froggy strode to a table near a window looking out onto Sixth Avenue and dropped into a chair with the air of a man who has conquered the world. Although Froggy would not have admitted it, he was suffering with a swollen egotism.

He looked over the breakfast menu with vague eyes; he rested his chin in the palm of his hand and considered the various dishes with a half contemptuous smile.

Froggy had a certain wholesome contempt for everything this morning. Joe

Berne, Froggy's manager, was in his own seventh heaven. But that troubled Froggy not in the least. What Berne had told him about keeping up the good work and letting the girls alone was merely a trifling annoyance to Froggy. What did Joe Berne know about women, anyway.

Froggy asked himself this question with a sarcastic smile as he decided upon coffee and eggs for his breakfast. Froggy felt that he was stepping to a lively jazz tune now with the coming of success—nothing could stop him, and Froggy had always more or less naïvely classed himself with the smartest and most romantic sheiks of the age.

Froggy wrinkled his forehead and tilted back in his chair. He swept his eyes around the restaurant with a look of irritation stamped upon his face. He had come here to eat, not to sit in a chair and wait for some one to take his order.

What was the matter with this place? Didn't they know who he was? Froggy

rested his elbows upon the table and gave himself over to bright visions of his future. He was enjoying a great peace of mind.

He was still basking in this silent, warming flood of joy when some one slipped up beside the chair and murmured: "Order, please?"

Froggy jerked his elbows from the table and lifted his head, a smothered oath leaping to his lips. This was fine service!

"Listen," he started to rasp; but the words died in his throat, and he merely continued to stare into the vividly pretty face of the slim little girl who stood patiently waiting, with a pad in her hand and a short pencil poised in a businesslike manner.

Froggy sat rigid for a moment, watching her. All he thought about was how pretty she was.

What she was thinking about he didn't know—for she never once looked at him. She had bobbed hair that was almost red, a pair of the snappiest blue eyes that Froggy had ever gazed into—and some figure!

He raised his eyebrows involuntarily and drew a long breath. She was certainly his style! No mistaking that.

"Some baby!" he muttered with a husky laugh.

"Order, please," the glorious one murmured again in that vague, far-away voice.

"Listen," Froggy said with a grin, "drop the book and the pencil and give me a look, kid—you're a bright little candle for fair."

"Don't get fresh! Order, please." That was all; in the same unconcerned, unruffled tone.

Froggy took another long breath; reached out and touched her hand.

"Listen, cutie," he said in a friendly voice, "don't you know who I am?"

Swiftly and very deftly she moved her hand away, and Froggy was conscious of the fact that she had given him an icy stare.

"If I did," she said solemnly, "I'd tell you to keep the change."

"Fly, ain't you?" Froggy remarked with a laugh.

"Are you here to talk or do you want to eat?" she returned, tapping the pencil upon the order book.

"Honest," Froggy went on insistently, "don't you know who I am?"

"What difference does that make?" she inquired naïvely. "Yo're going to die some day anyway." She moved her head impatiently.

Froggy hesitated for an instant; he was torn between the desire to laugh and give the girl some information that would make her think. He shot a questioning look at her.

She was gazing down into his eyes now, serenely. Froggy became conscious of a thrill chasing up and down his spine. She was some baby!

"Listen, doll," he said, twisting his mouth into a smile, "I been in this city a long time—but I ain't never seen any flicker that could slip me the raspberry when I wasn't looking."

"Are you trying to make a date with me?" she asked with a sudden bright smile.

"That's the way to talk!" Froggy said.

"Because if you are," she tossed back with a shrug of contempt, "put the ticket on ice—I'm signed up for six weeks."

"Popular, ain't you?" Froggy snapped, his pride wounded.

No girl had ever treated him like this. He was a sheik among sheiks; most girls were only too anxious to receive his rather exclusive attentions.

"Listen to me," he said with vehemence, "I'm Froggy Martin—the real ace of the middle-weight class of the world. You got that?"

"Tell it to Sweeney," she retorted, shaking her head and frowning. "He's a good barber—maybe he could give you a good hair cut."

That seemed to leave Froggy unsatisfied and furious. This was a new experience for him. It only increased his determination to make the girl melt.

"All right," he said with a grunt, "Bring me some coffee and grape-nuts. Buttered toast, too."

The girl wrote down his order in silence and swung around on her heel to walk away from the table.

"Wait a minute!" Froggy called sharply. She paused and looked back at him with an impatient glance.

"Got anything on to-night, baby?" he asked with a smile.

"Sure," she shot back with a shrug of her shoulders. "I'll have my head on my shoulders and my little brain tucked away in it."

"A nifty shooter, ain't you?" Froggy observed sarcastically. "But, listen, I'll get you yet," he finished, and he seemed to be voicing a warning.

He watched her go the length of the long room and disappear through a swinging door. Then he settled back in his chair and muttered something under his breath.

But the truth was, the snappy little waitress had made a deep impression on Froggy Martin. He made up his mind in this moment to be her conquering hero. He'd have her dated up before he finished his breakfast.

But thirty minutes later, when he shoved back his chair, he hadn't dated her up, nor had he come anywhere near that object of his concentration. He had been skillful enough to learn that her name was Martha Bryan. That was about as far as he got.

She was coldly and unenthusiastically contemptuous of everything he said. His charms made no impression upon her. His name was a total loss so far as giving her a thrill was concerned.

Froggy went out of the restaurant with a vow. He went out with the picture of her in his mind. The picture haunted him all the way over to Rourke's gymnasium, where he had a sparring match on with Bill Carson. The picture kept passing through his mind like a slowly moving train. It clung to him all through the sparring bout with Carson.

Joe Berne watched Froggy move about as though he were in a trance. Carson tapped him at will. Froggy's defense was child-like; his speed was the speed of a slow freight; his movements were the movements of a man who has something on his mind.

"Listen, you big egg!" Berne shouted, after Carson had slammed Froggy on the point of the jaw with a snappy uppercut. "Take off the gloves and come into the office—I want to talk to you. You act like you was string-halted or full of the measles."

Froggy slipped into his old gray bathrobe and walked toward the office with a vague smile. He was rubbing his chin reflectively;

Berne trailed after him, a line of stringing abuse pouring from his lips; but Froggy heard never a word. His mind was far away.

Berne grabbed him by the shoulder and pushed him violently into a chair.

"You big rubber plant!" he growled. "What have you been eating for breakfast—headache powders? Why, the way Bill smacked you around gave me the earache. Ain't you got any brain cells left? Don't you know you're going up against Picker Varth Friday night? Don't you know he's one of the fastest steppers in the business? What's the matter with you?"

Froggy merely made a slight motion of protest with one hand and frowned a little. He wasn't looking at Berne at all—his gaze was riveted upon the ceiling, and there was a meditative look in his eyes.

"Come out of the ether!" Berne yelled. He picked up a chair and hurled it across the room; it struck the wall with a crash.

"Sure," said Froggy vaguely, looking at Berne with a crooked smile. "I guess it's all right."

"You guess what's all right?" Berne roared. "You got fleas crawling around over your brain, boy. Listen to what I'm telling you! You got to get down to cases and do some real work. The way Bill Carson slapped you around was a joke. Don't get the fishy idea that because you socked the Kid for the count the other night you're going to have a date with Lady Luck—"

"That's just what I was thinking about," Froggy murmured. "If I could date her up O. K.—"

"Let her alone," Berne snapped, not meaning what Froggy meant at all. "Any guy in this game that plays her is a sucker. No, sir—you're a good boy and I'm going to push you to the top—but get the luck idea out of your head. And listen: you got to stop standing up so straight and go back to your crouch. You ain't training to be an actor—you're a fighter."

"I was just thinking," Froggy said, rubbing his chin and looking at the floor with that trancelike stare, "that I ought to order some new clothes."

"I promise myself that I'm going to bury

you with my own spade if you don't cut that baby talk out," Berne rasped.

He jerked a package of cigarettes from his pocket and lighted one. Then he stepped over to Froggy's side and tapped him on the arm.

"Listen," he said savagely, "stop thinking about being a fashion ticket and get your bean set on the little old fight. I've seen a lot of crazy eggs get busted when they got to fooling around in the Beau Brummel class. Now this guy Varth—he's got a wicked right, but he's a mistake when it comes to boxing. All you got to do with him is play him for a sinker for about four rounds—then paste him. See?"

Froggy took a deep breath and rose with a yawn. He had just conceived a new idea. It made him smile. No girl had ever treated him the way that little baby had in the Manhattan Restaurant.

"Guess I won't do any more to-day, Joe," Froggy said.

"You guess what!" Berne shouted, seizing Froggy by the arm and whirling him around. "You got another think coming. I'm going to work you out all afternoon. You're in no condition to fight Varth Friday night. You're a total loss."

"Oh, that lemon ain't worrying me," Froggy said contemptuously. "I'll put him to sleep about the second round. He knows what I can do. He's afraid of me. He saw me fight the Kid. Why, my name alone would scare Picker into taking the count."

Joe Berne looked at Froggy for a long time in utter silence. Then he drummed his knuckles on the edge of the desk and frowned; he growled some unintelligible word. But Froggy just shook his head and grinned in that indefinite way which got Berne crazy.

"Don't forget what I'm telling you," Berne snarled, pointing his finger at Froggy warningly, "I've seen a lot of good boys kiss the mat because their heads got big and their ideas called for the dude stuff and some dames. I'm going downstairs and get Slicker to do some foot-work with you this morning. Get your brain warmed up and follow me."

He crossed toward the door; paused and

shot Froggy a look of contempt; opened the door and passed through.

Ten minutes later, Froggy Martin slipped out of the gymnasium unseen by Joe Berne and walked toward Broadway, whistling blithely. He made his way to the box-office of a theatre which housed one of the biggest musical comedy hits of the season. Here he cheerfully parted with eleven dollars for two seats for the night performance—then he struck out in the direction of his tailor.

At lunch-time, Froggy strolled casually into the Manhattan Restaurant and sought a table as close to the one he had had at breakfast as possible. This was exactly four tables removed from the one he wanted.

He looked around the room eagerly. But nowhere did he see the girl with the bobbed almost red hair. He frowned and glanced at the menu when a fleshy young woman with too-red cheeks waddled up to his table and asked for his order in a high, nasal tone.

Froggy shot her a deadly look and she gave him a friendly smile—which was totally lost on him.

Some one at his elbow was eating toast and Maryland crab. Froggy looked; and when he looked, he gave a start and jerked forward in his chair a little. The some one was Picker Varth.

A moment later Varth looked up and caught Froggy's eyes fastened upon him. Picker growled a "hello" and Froggy snapped a word of greeting back. A sudden, burning suspicion leaped into Froggy's mind. His eyes glowed with a feverish light. He had a sudden hunch, a painful premonition that Picker Varth was eating here for the same reason that he was—and that reason was Martha Bryan.

Froggy scowled and shoved his chair over a bit, so that he could lean across and speak to Varth without any one hearing him.

"Listen, you poor sap!" he snarled. "I'm going to bust your jaw Friday night. I'm going to make mince meat of you—see?"

Picker Varth raised startled eyes and looked at Froggy with a twisted smile.

"Sure," he said in a low voice. "You got a chance—try it."

That was all. Froggy jerked his chair back and ate his lunch in grim silence. He never looked again at Varth. But he kept on looking for the girl with the almost red hair. She didn't appear—and Froggy left the restaurant in an ugly frame of mind.

Later in the afternoon he went back to Rourke's gymnasium with his fury mounting all the time. Picker Varth was after her, was he! Well, let the poor sucker try to get her. Not a chance for him!

Joe Berne was purple in the face when Froggy came onto the floor in his trunks. He cut loose with a line of talk that would have grown hair on any fighter's face. But it didn't faze Froggy in the least.

He started in at a whirlwind rate of speed and sent three sparring-partners to cover in short order. Berne began to shout and rub his hands with sheer joy. When Froggy knocked Carson cold after three short turns, Berne went into an ecstasy of delight.

Froggy never uttered a single word. He finished with a half snarl of rage, had his gloves unlaced and hurled them across the room. Then he strode out, muttering to himself.

"That guy's getting batty!" Berne said hoarsely, looking after him. "He's taking gas or eating onions—he ain't just right. But he's there with his dukes."

Froggy went back to the Manhattan Restaurant for a late dinner. But he got no satisfaction out of the meal. There was no waitress with almost red hair in the whole place. And reposing in his pocket were the two tickets which had set him back eleven dollars.

None of the other girls pleased his fancy; so he tore the tickets into bits and tossed them into his coffee cup. He kicked his chair over and walked out, with the manager and several startled diners looking after him.

The next day he went to the manager and asked for Martha Bryan. He was cheered by the announcement that she had been off and would be back on the job tomorrow. His spirits rose immeasurably.

But the girl with the almost red hair was not in the Manhattan Restaurant the next day. And the next day was Friday.

Froggy went to the manager with a belligerent air and demanded to know why he had told him a lie. The manager suavely explained that Martha Bryan had decided to take another day off—and would return to-morrow. And Froggy walked mechanically from the restaurant with a savage smile on his lips.

It was all very clear to his distorted imagination now. Picker Varth was the boy he wanted to see. He wanted to see him with a good, stinging uppercut—he wanted to greet him with a fist loaded with steam.

He remembered that Picker had appeared only the one time in the Manhattan Restaurant. And Picker was the reason for the girl with almost red hair taking a vacation—the double-crossing fighter was trying to keep her away from the unmistakable charms of one Froggy Martin!

Froggy entered the ring with his shoulders hunched ominously. He carried himself with the air of strong, cautious reserve which had made him a canny fighter. His mouth was drawn down at the corners and his eyes were pin-points of fire.

He was greeted with a rousing cheer. He bowed without the sign of a smile and went to his corner. Joe Berne was watching him with a perplexed frown. But he got no answer to the question he asked Froggy—nothing more than a savage snarl.

The moment Picker Varth entered the ring, Froggy lifted his head and shot one swift, malevolent glance at him. But Picker wasn't even looking in that direction. He appeared to be a trifle nervous.

He went to his corner and fidgeted around on his stool; he crossed and uncrossed his legs. And all the while, Froggy sat as immovable as a stone, watching his opponent with a deadly glare and an ugly smile.

As Berne bent over him to lace on the gloves, he snapped: "I'm goin' to kill that egg!"

It was a whirlwind fight from the start. Froggy went in savagely and uppercutted Picker with a stiff one that almost took him off his feet. Varth came back with a stinging right hook to the jaw that made Froggy's head swim. And the real fight was on.

Picker seemed to sense the deadly meaning of the other's furious attack; he stepped back and allowed Froggy to rush him.

Just before the gong sounded for the finish of the first round, Froggy rushed Picker to the ropes. They clinched and Froggy gave the half groggy Varth a volley of short-arm jabs that made the other grunt with pain.

"Listen, you dirty rat!" Froggy snarled in Picker's ear. "I'm going to spoil your face so's she won't know whether you're a piece of celery or a sieve."

The second round was a repetition of the first. There was no let-up.

Froggy rushed and Picker took it gamely. He was bleeding profusely and one of his eyes was almost swollen shut. But he had an amazing capacity for taking punishment, despite his palpable weakness as a boxer.

There was nothing skillful about Varth's fighting method; he just slugged and took the high pressure punches with astonishing elasticity. It was one of those inspiring fights which brings the spectators up cheering, with neither fighter actually a favorite.

Picker was groggy in the fourth. He was staggering a little and clinching desperately. Froggy was breathing harder all the time, but the savagery of his attack never broke for a single second. He was a wind-mill of punishing blows.

But somehow, he couldn't put Varth out. It was like punching a hard rubber ball.

In the fifth, Picker went down under a shower of rights and lefts to the face. He took the count of six and staggered to his feet amid a roar of applause.

He struck out blindly and caught Froggy in the ear. But it was a light tap and served only to increase Froggy's rage. Picker saved himself by going into a clinch and hanging on desperately.

Just before the gong, Froggy stepped back and aimed a wicked right—but it missed and Varth handed back a stiff left to the neck that pained Froggy more than he liked to admit.

Froggy's speed slackened perceptibly in the sixth. He was beginning to feel tired, a little sluggish. Weights were dragging at his feet. Varth was a tough customer.

No one ever knew how it happened. It was one of those strange, almost incredible things of the prize ring—one of those twists of fate, those dealings of Lady Luck.

It happened in the middle of the sixth round. Froggy had carried Picker to the ropes with a line of slashing lefts. He was trying to save his right for the last punch.

Varth was a sight. His face was a mass of welts. One eye was completely closed; the other was almost blinded by a tiny stream of blood trickling down from a cut over it.

He was defending himself almost blindly. Only twice during the entire round had he succeeded in punching Froggy Martin. There was scarcely a mark on Froggy. But he was tired; he was staggering; his punches had lost most of their steam.

They came out of a hard clinch—one of those clinches where fighters fairly hang on to each other and involuntarily take a brief second of rest. Picker rallied just after they broke. He slammed a hard right squarely and stingingly into Froggy's left eye—and a second later Froggy wasn't seeing out of that eye.

They pivoted, spun, danced, staggered to the center of the ring. The spectators were breathless now. There was no question of the outcome—the answer would come in this round. Picker Varth had put up a game fight—but here was his Waterloo.

Froggy saw an opening through a haze floating before his one good eye. He stepped back. With a lightninglike movement, he swung back his good right; he raised his left arm instinctively, bringing it away from the lower part of his body.

There was a sharp, sickening thud on the point of Picker's jaw, and simultaneous with the sound of the blow, came the smack of a hard glove against Froggy Martin's stomach—a terrific solar-plexus wallop.

A sharp grunt of pain from Froggy—the sound of Picker Varth striking the canvas—to be followed a fraction of a second later by the faint thudding of Froggy Martin's body upon the canvas. A yell of amazement from the crowd—followed by a roaring cheer as both men were counted out.

When Froggy Martin strode into Varth's dressing room forty minutes later with Joe Berne holding him firmly by the arm, he found Picker sitting on a chair, his face covered with sticking plasters and both eyes swollen almost shut.

"Listen, you big turnip!" Froggy snarled. "The next time we get together, I'll kill you. It was an accident."

"Maybe it was," Picker answered dazedly. "Anyway, what you got against me—I never stole your jewels."

"I'll tell you," Froggy shouted, trying to break loose from Berne, who flung both arms around him and began to plead, "that red-haired dame in the Manhattan Restaurant—I had her all lined up for a date till you butted in—"

"What you kiddin' about?" Picker got out of his chair with a painful look of astonishment. "I ain't bothered any red-haired girl."

"Don't try to crab me!" Froggy belowed. "You know the one I mean—the real beaut with red hair—Martha Bryan."

Varth sat down heavily and grinned. He shook his head and ran his fingers through his wet hair.

"You're all wrong," he said limply. "I know the one you mean—sure. She was a peach. I tried to date her up a week ago and she gave me the plaster Paris stare. She got married a couple of days ago and went back to Indiana to the farm."

"Got married!" Froggy staggered back into Berne's arms with a yell. "Why didn't that manager tell me—the crazy baloney?"

"Say, he just wanted to keep you eatin' there," Picker answered with a weary smile.

"Ain't that hell?" Froggy muttered in a dazed voice. "And me spending eleven bucks for theater tickets and orderin' some new clothes. Anyway," he added in a far-away tone, "she was some baby."

THE END

SWIFT ROMANCE

OH, he was rough and unrefined
And she was gently bred,
With noble ancestors behind,
Distinguished all, but dead.

With beady brow and greasy shirt,
Rough specimen, indeed,
He met her—nothing could avert
Their meeting's force and speed.

Though he was rough and quite uncouth,
And she was gently sweet,
Without an if-you-please, forsooth,
He swept her off her feet.

Ah, do not ask me where or how—
I'll answer not, I fear . . .
For she was just a Guernsey cow,
And he an engineer.

Beatrice Ashton Vandegrift.

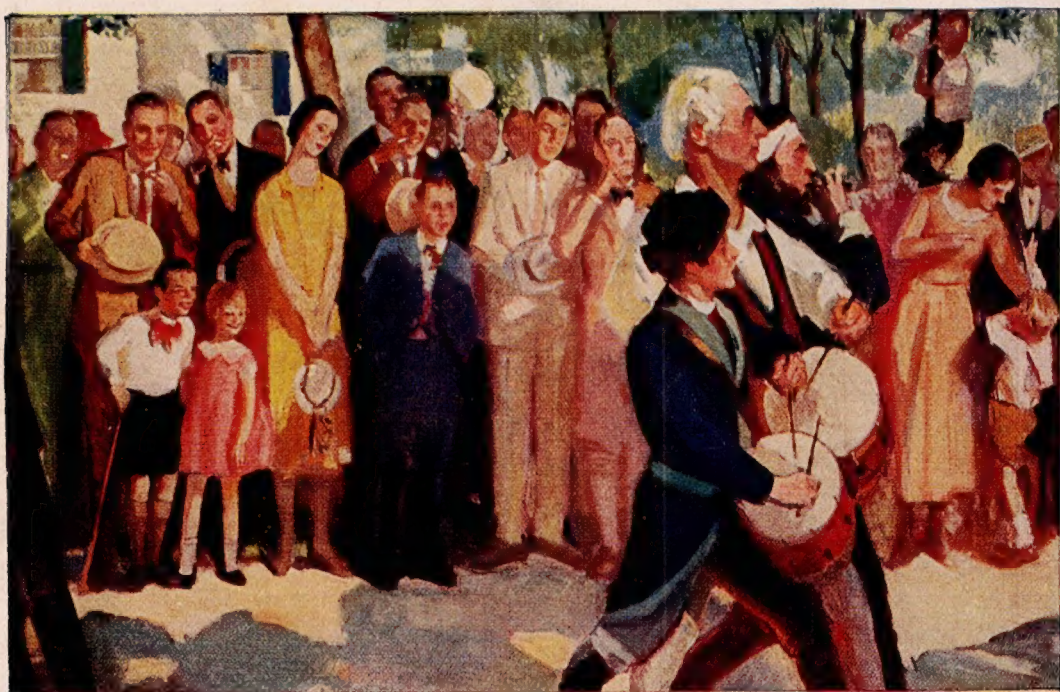


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